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ABSTRACT

This report analyzes recent English-language research on basic skills in the workplace. Part A, a thematic guide to the field, includes detailed references to publications listed in Part B. Section A1 indicates the scope. It defines basic skills and underlines the importance of other terms, especially key skills, information and communications technologies (ICT), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and "other languages" regularly used at work in the United Kingdom. Section A2 defines approaches to basic skills in the workplace, including workplace as a site for basic skills training, situated literacies, and functional analysis. Section A3 discusses major themes in research on workplace basic skills, such as ESOL, ICT, and mathematics; scope of workplace basic skills; relationship between basic skills and workplace change and between basic skills and other forms of training; and the role of trade unions. Section A4 on effectiveness of current workplace basic skills programs shows evidence from successful good practice about what works and what does not. Section A5 addresses who writes about workplace basic skills, including academic researchers, government agencies, membership organizations, and worker-students. Section A6 indicates future research needs. Section B1 lists 92 references. Section B2 contains 103 listings in an annotated bibliography under headings related to contexts, themes, and issues defined in Part A. Part B3 lists 43 contacts and websites. (YLB)

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Basic skills in the workplace

A research review

John Payne

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Basic skills in the workplace

A research review

John Payne

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Introduction

The purpose of this study

The Moser Report (1999) estimated that as many as one in five adults in the UK had insufficient literacy skills for the demands of daily life and work, with a larger number of people having problems with numeracy. The workplace is a key site where this drama is played out. It is both the place where low skill levels are hidden or exposed, and a key site for implementing programmes to raise standards of literacy and numeracy. This report identifies recent English-language research on basic skills in the workplace. It attempts to record and analyse what has been written about the subject and to provide an overview of the field. It seeks to provide information that will:

- inform policy regarding the expansion of workplace basic skills as part of the government's basic skills strategy
- inform practice by established and new providers of workplace basic skills
- inform decisions about future research priorities.

The report addresses a wide audience of key agencies concerned with policy, development and support for basic skills in the workplace. It also contains much that will be of interest to providers of workplace basic skills. The new National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy was set up early in 2002 to provide a firm evidence base for policies in adult literacy and numeracy. Part of the remit of this centre is to establish clear research findings in relation to the delivery of basic skills in the workplace. This survey should be valuable in informing the planning of research in this area.

What we know and what we need to know

There are a number of persistent questions asked by policy-makers, adult learning managers and practitioners in the field of basic skills. These include:

1 What is the need for workplace basic skills? How do these needs relate to workplace change, such as the introduction of new technologies into the workplace?
2 What is the impact on learners of workplace basic skills programmes? Are there wider benefits to people as individuals and as members of communities, as well as benefits to them as workers?
3 What is the impact on business of workplace basic skills programmes? Is it possible to measure precise productivity gains? Are there wider benefits such as improved industrial relations, and more positive worker attitudes to their jobs and to workplace change?
4 What are the factors that determine the effectiveness or otherwise of programmes designed to enhance workplace basic skills?

These are not simple questions, and this report does not pretend to provide simple answers. We have indicated where research evidence casts light in dark corners, and we have also made it clear how frequently such dark corners remain untouched by the light of research evidence.

How this study works

This **Introduction** acts as a guide to the review, and shows how to use it to maximum effect. **Part A** is a thematic guide to the field: it includes detailed references to publications listed in **Part B** of the guide.

Section A1 indicates the scope of this field. We examine the definition of basic skills and underline the importance of a number of other terms in this area of work, especially key skills, information and communications technologies (ICT), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and 'other' languages (ie other languages regularly used at work in the UK). Our aim is to be broad rather than comprehensive, given the urgent need to offer a practical guide to researchers, practitioners and policy-makers in the present policy context.

Section A2 defines a number of *contexts of* and *approaches to* basic skills in the workplace, which underlie the research reviewed. We have attempted to give some indication of both the substantive issues being debated, and the strength of feelings generated by current debates about literacy and numeracy.

Section A3 contains commentary on some of the major *strands* in the research literature on workplace basic skills, such as ESOL, ICT and mathematics; the scope of workplace basic skills; the relationship between basic skills and workplace change, and between basic skills and other forms of training; and the role of trade unions.

Section A4 deals with the issue of the *effectiveness* of current workplace basic skills programmes. It suggests that although it cannot be claimed that there are comprehensive research findings, there is some evidence from successful good practice about what works and what does not work: this should not be ignored.

Section A5 asks *who writes about workplace basic skills and with what purpose*. It contains useful case studies of a university, a government agency, a membership organisation and worker–students.

Section A6 indicates *future research needs* in order to ensure that future policy and practice are based on evidence from the field. It suggests, in particular, that a move to 'evidence-based policy and practice' requires more consistent ways of capturing local knowledge and good practice, as well as suggesting priorities and substantive themes for future research effort.

Part B is a reference tool.

Section B1 gives references to all works mentioned in **Part A**.

Section B2 contains an annotated bibliography under a number of headings related to the contexts, themes and issues defined in **Part A**.

Section B3 offers a list of contacts and websites, in the UK and elsewhere, which will be of use to the reader who wants to pursue these important issues.

Part A

A1 What this publication is about

Definitions

The definition of 'basic skills' used by the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) is a clear and useful starting point: 'the ability to read, write and speak in English, and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general'.

It should be noted, however, that this definition does not make explicit mention of ESOL. There are also more complicated issues related to key skills and ICT skills, which are particularly important in the workplace, as we shall explain below (**section A3.3**), and which cannot be encapsulated in a single-sentence definition. It might also be added that there is no acknowledgement in this definition of cultural diversity or of the importance of developing critical faculties and active citizenship, all of which are very relevant to this field.

There is a major issue as to whether definitions of basic skills which include only literacy and numeracy are adequate to deal with the complex demands of the modern workplace. In **section A6,** we argue that future research must provide an evidence base for future policy and practice. In consequence, we have taken particular interest in reports of successful practice that moves across borders set up by government agencies and other institutions. This publication has not excluded, therefore, reports of research in which 'basic skills in the workplace' are taken to include 'key skills' – including communication, ICT, and 'soft skills' such as teamwork, customer care, and the development of positive attitudes to learning and change.

Scope of the review

The overall aim has been to write something that is broad in scope. There are a relatively small number of research-based publications which refer to the UK, and a relatively large number of publications available in other English-speaking countries. It will be noted in the annotated bibliography (**section B2**) that a small number of UK-based researchers are mentioned repeatedly. This gives some sense of both the importance of these researchers, but also the lack of a broad base of relevant research activity within the UK. It is a skyscraper rather than a palace of research activities. We have also noted, in passing, the strong organisational framework for development in countries such as Australia and New Zealand. We have not gone beyond English-language sources, which means that the publication is weak on other European approaches to basic skills in the workplace.

This publication seeks to report on recent research findings in this field: the findings include both empirical and theoretical research, and use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Our definition of research embraces academic research, the popularisation of academic knowledge in publications, such as *Adults Learning*, which are directed at professional audiences, and evaluative or reflective accounts (as opposed to uncritical descriptions) of successful practice. In **section A6,** we note the

weaknesses of the present position in the UK. These weaknesses can be summed up in four interlocking statements:

- academic research has shown little interest in the issue of workplace basic skills
- there has been no consistent effort to 'capture' local knowledge about what works and what does not work in this field
- weak research findings tend to be quoted without taking account of criticisms of their problematic nature
- in general, there is an insufficient body of robust research to underpin policy developments.

Practitioners must reconcile the competing claims of policy-makers, organisational structures, employers and workers. They can call on support from the Workplace Basic Skills Network and the Basic Skills Agency (BSA), including its regional staff. What they cannot do is to point to a body of relevant research that informs the decisions they make about practice.

Our starting point

The most recent attempt in the UK to summarise research findings on adult basic skills is Brooks *et al.* (2001). The scope of this publication is extremely broad, attempting as it does to summarise the substantive findings of the research in addition to providing a bibliography. Its value in the present context is very limited. Less than two pages (out of 157 text pages, excluding references) are devoted to 'Provision by employers and in the workplace'. There are only 13 references directly relating to workplace basic skills, a fact which underlines the need for a more comprehensive review of research in this field. This publication seeks to address that need.

Holland with Frank and Cooke (1998) summarises the main research published up to about 1996 (there are a few later references). The format is similar to that of this publication. An overview of the territory is followed by three essays referenced to research literature in English-speaking countries: 'Crisis and competitiveness', 'High-performance workplaces' and 'The learning organisation'. In the second part, an annotated list of documents is followed by a general list of references. The usefulness of the book for both practitioners and policy-makers is, perhaps, constrained by two factors:

- the overall tone is theoretical, and much of the theory relates to arguments about the nature of literacy and the changing nature of work and workplaces
- the book does not attempt to capture the experience of those involved directly in the delivery of basic skills in the workplace.

At the same time, the present text is indebted to the model provided by this book. While in general, we have not repeated references from Holland with Frank and Cooke (1998), we have included a dozen or so texts that seem to us to be of key importance, with the original annotations repeated by permission of the authors. The majority of the texts cited here are too recent to be included in Holland with Frank and Cooke, however, and only a tiny handful of earlier works which escaped the attention of those authors are included.

A2 Contexts and approaches to the subject of workplace basic skills

'Workplace basic skills' as a field does not exist independently of the developments (both conceptual and practical) that have transformed the adult learning field in recent years. As part of the preparation for this publication, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) convened an expert seminar in 2001 to discuss an early draft. The list of those attending the seminar is given in **Appendix 1**. There was a strong feeling that developments in workplace basic skills should not be considered apart from these wider developments. Those mentioned included learning theory; learning organisation theory; lifelong learning; the learning society; community-based learning; wider benefits of learning; economic benefits of learning; neighbourhood renewal; open and distance learning; information, advice and guidance (IAG); formal and informal learning and mentoring; and the development of learning methodologies based on ICT (Edwards *et al.* 1998).

We want to emphasise that workplace basic skills need to be seen both as part of a larger whole, and as something that must always be taken account of in making policy and resource allocation decisions. This applies equally to educational providers and to employers. It is not something that can be pigeon-holed and left to a few experts or specialist organisations. We also want to emphasise that the subject is not without its own debates and controversies, and we hope that this publication, especially in the annotated bibliographical section (**B2**) will reflect these debates.

We intend to consider three broad approaches to the field:

The workplace as a site for basic skills learning emphasises both the conceptual continuity between workplace basic skills and other forms of adult learning, and the importance of progression routes.

Situated literacies adopts a perspective which sees skills as developing and being used in specific social contexts, with considerable implications for both the organisation and curriculum of workplace learning.

Functional analysis looks at the specific requirements for language and mathematical skills in the workplace, and emphasises programme design to meet these specific needs.

The workplace as a site for basic skills learning

This approach views the objective of basic skills courses in the workplace as providing the first rung on the ladder of adult learning. The assumption is that when workers have 'brushed up' on basic educational skills, such as English and mathematics, which they have not used much since school, or acquired a knowledge of basic computing, they will want to move on to other forms of education and training. This is, by and large, the approach adopted by Forrester, Payne and Ward (1995). They reviewed programmes in a number of local authorities in England and Scotland, where the emphasis was very much on the workers involved and their desire to make up for what were seen as lost opportunities when they were younger. These programmes were driven more by the interests of the workers than by the needs of the employer. They offered an example of

how general educational needs could be tackled in the workplace, and how basic skills could be the springboard for progression and further involvement in lifelong learning. In retrospect, the programmes proved vulnerable to changing priorities and cost-cutting within local government.

Frank (1996) reports on a longitudinal study of students from a number of workplaces (public and private): these students took workplace literacy courses or return-to-study courses in 1991/2. Many had continued to develop study interests, both related to their jobs and to their other interests. There was a particular emphasis on the value of student writing and on building residential components into workplace learning schemes. This allowed students, most of whom were manual workers, time and space for learning, which they did not generally have in either working or family lives. The report suggests that such longer-term benefits are at risk because of:

- changes in employer policy, as well as in the economic fortunes of individual companies
- the adoption of a narrower approach to workplace basic skills
- short-termism on the part of colleges, funding agencies and employers.

The emphasis on progression and on basic skills as a 'first rung' of adult learning may lead to a view of literacy and numeracy as decontextualised generic skills. The 'problem' of workplace basic skills is then seen as part of a wider problem of the failure of many people (for a variety of reasons, not all of which are seen as their own fault) to acquire reasonable levels in English and mathematics before leaving full-time education. The figures for high levels of illiteracy and innumeracy, given in the Moser Report (1999), and subsequently much repeated, are open to question. Frank and Hamilton (1999) see these as figures relating to tasks that most people would easily avoid.

Tom Sticht, in an article in the *BSA Newsletter* (2002), argues that the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) figures quoted by Moser provide an overestimate of the problem. There has also been criticism of the methodology employed by the IALS (Hamilton and Barton 2000). In her most recent contribution to the debate, Hamilton (2001) has attempted to show how the techniques used by the IALS have developed a powerful discourse, which has influenced policy developments in many countries.

The pedagogical implications of the IALS methodology are that standardised tasks and tests can be used in workplace provision. This tends to go against an emphasis in UK adult literacy practice on the use of teaching materials and methods which reflect the interests of learners, which has informed much of the best practice in the workplace (see eg Noel 1998a). Indeed, Sticht (cited in Moore 2001) claims that use of specific, job-related material in workplace basic skills provision produced much greater gains than use of generic materials.

Basic skills needs within organisations are not necessarily limited to workers in the lowest-skilled jobs (Moore 2001). An approach that emphasises the need for basic skills to lay the foundation for further learning will be in danger of ignoring literacy or numeracy needs of workers who already hold positions of responsibility.

Table 1 summarises the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

Table 1

Strengths of the 'basic skills as a basis for further learning' approach	**Weaknesses of the 'basic skills as a basis for further learning' approach**
Addresses the low level of educational achievement of many adults	May dilute the emphasis on specific basic skills needs in the workplace which affect workers' abilities to perform their jobs
Tackling basic skills through the workplace may solve problems of time, money and transport which act as barriers to participation in adult learning	Does not lay sufficient emphasis on basic skills needs which may arise at different levels of skill and responsibility within a work organisation
Has built up political support for action on basic skills at both national and international levels	Can lead to an overemphasis on standardised tasks and tests in the workplace
Emphasises that for many people, basic skills may be just the first step in wider involvement in education and training	Because of the absence of large-scale longitudinal studies, evidence for progression routes is weak

Situated literacies

The concept of 'situated literacies' has its roots in both literacy and learning theory. Literacy theory points out that much of language acquisition and use is dependent on social context. In a similar way, situated learning theory emphasises the specific contexts in which human beings learn. These contexts go far beyond organised learning (school or training workshop) – especially in the home, in voluntary organisations and in the workplace. A similar approach, emphasising the social context in which mathematics is used and its affective and cultural dimensions, can also be applied to numeracy skills (Hoyles and Noss 2000).

Barton and Hamilton (2000) defined 'literacy practices' as follows:

> *Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices. Literacy is historically situated. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.*

The authors also make the simple, but fundamental, point that literacy and learning are bound up with one another, since it is through language that people acquire and express knowledge of social situations: '…any theory of literacy involves a theory of learning. *Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making* as well as formal education and training.' [emphasis as in original].

The centrality of the worker's own use of language in different life contexts is clear in Frank and Hamilton's (1993) study of workplace basic skills. Its close connections with personal and educational development is even clearer in Frank's follow-up study (1996) of the subsequent learning careers of some of these workers, as it is in Benseman and Moore (2000). This approach may also emphasise student writing, which itself has a long history within approaches to adult literacy in the UK. The 'situated literacies' approach (sometimes referred to as the 'new literacy studies') is of particular relevance to current policy debates, because it offers a critical perspective on the present strategy. For such commentators, current policy is based on a view of literacy which deals only in the 'surface' features of language (eg spelling, grammar), rather than the complex communicative demands of the modern workplace (Street 2001). For a critical view of this approach, see Stephens (2000), who argues that there are features of language which are independent of context and can be taught in a formal way.

A 'situated literacies' approach to basic skills in the workplace is attractive to practitioners, but presents considerable difficulties for policy-makers. This approach argues that practitioners need to analyse and understand how literacy is used in a work situation in order to make improvements. But because literacy practices depend on context, there can never be a general prescription that applies across different work-sites.

Table 2 summarises the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

Table 2

Strengths of the 'situated literacies' approach	**Weaknesses of the 'situated literacies' approach**
Emphasises language use in context – in this case, the workplace	It ignores features of language which may be independent of context
Locates pedagogical approaches to improving basic skills within the cultural context of the workplace and the communities in which people live	In terms of the development of policy and practice, it does not offer universally valid prescriptions
Emphasises the centrality of literacy to all other forms of learning in industrial societies	May serve to privilege literacy over other forms of important workplace learning (eg mathematical knowledge, ICT, interpersonal skills and so on).

Functional analysis

Functional analysis is superficially similar to situated literacies as an approach to workplace basic skills, since both emphasise the actual use of language and mathematics in the workplace. Functional analysis takes the view that what was described above as the 'complex communicative demands of the modern workplace' can be analysed and described. In this way, basic skills training in the workplace can support workers in the specific literacy and numeracy tasks they are required to perform (for example, making out reports or calculations). The approach can also, of course, be used for any set of skills and related training in the workplace. Indeed, functional analysis may

include 'key skills' (see **section A1** for definition of terms) and the use of computers for tasks such as data input and word processing.

Where situated literacies represents an 'open' approach (language use continually evolves and relates, in turn, to other cultural contexts), functional analysis takes a 'closed' approach (the emphasis is on the actual use at a particular place and moment in time). While in some ways this might be described as a 'narrow' view, in other ways it marks a decisive break with the idea that skills taught 'in the abstract' at school can simply be transferred across to the workplace. Mikulechy, Albers and Peers (1994) are among those who have argued that there may be little transfer across from literacy learned in general educational settings to literacy practices in the workplace. Fitzsimons (2000a) has made similar points in relation to school mathematics and workplace numeracy. A lot more information is required to determine the circumstances under which skills learned in particular ways do or do not transfer to other contexts; how this may differ for different target groups; and how transfer of learning can be enhanced.

Functional analysis is usually closely linked to economic requirements, and does not take account of other purposes the worker may have for literacy and other skills, or other contexts in which they may want to use them. It may also place too much emphasis on what workers cannot do, rather than what they can do. As O'Connor (1994) puts it: 'Educational interventions need to start from a premise of existing skills, knowledge and ability, if they are to use those skills to assist in the development and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge'.

Table 3 summarises the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

Table 3

Strengths of the 'functional analysis' approach	**Weaknesses of the 'functional analysis' approach**
Attacks head-on the threat posed by the lack of basic skills to people's jobs and overall economic success	The use of skills at work may be divorced from their use in other contexts which are of equal value to the adult
Suggests a systematic and ongoing approach to workplace learning	Training programmes based on such an approach are more likely to prepare workers for current needs than future needs in a rapidly evolving labour market
Raises important issues in relation to transfer of learning	May reproduce some of the weaknesses of schooling in laying too much emphasis on what workers cannot do, rather than building on their current abilities
	May adopt a narrow approach to the basic skills learning needs of individuals

A3 Themes in workplace basic skills research and writing

A3.1 The extent of need and the scope of provision

The Moser Report (1999) highlighted figures which would suggest that 7m adults in England are in some way 'deficient' in basic skills. It also used emotive language such as 'scandal' and 'crisis' to draw attention to these figures and to secure the levels of government support it felt to be necessary for the task. The success of this strategy can be gauged from the speed with which government has moved to create the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit within the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and to make funding available to finance new initiatives in this field. It is estimated that up to half of the 7m adults with literacy and numeracy needs are in jobs, although many are in low-skilled or short-term employment (DfES 2001).

It is perhaps, however, a good moment to take stock of the situation. Official reports such as the Moser Report (1999) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC)/BSA publications (TUC/BSA 2000) continue to quote figures from the early 1990s on the cost of low basic skills to industry (ALBSU 1993), despite Robinson's (1997) persuasive criticism of the methodology for deriving these statistics. Alan Wells, Director of the BSA, writing in *Adults Learning* in June 2001, agreed that 'Adults who want to improve literacy and numeracy already have a range of skills and almost none are "illiterate" in the sense of not being able to read or write at all' (Wells 2001). He added that 'many of the estimated 7 million adults with weaknesses with basic skills have quite good skills and quite modest needs'.

There is an assumption that the main effort should be concentrated on those with the lowest levels of skills, equating this with 'greatest need' (DfES 2001). In practice, we may not have sufficient information about precise needs in specific jobs, and the ways in which these are changing, to make such decisions. As we emphasised above (**section A2**), literacy and numeracy needs in the workplace are not limited to the lowest-skilled workers, and there are significant advantages in emphasising the needs of those with supervisory responsibilities in the workplace. As we shall see (**section A3.8**), one of the innovations of the trade union approach has been to draw attention to the wider use of English in the workplace. The training of managers and supervisors in areas such as drafting 'user-friendly' notices and memos, or giving oral instructions, may well constitute a priority area which does not necessarily coincide with the 'lowest skills = greatest need' formula. There are different approaches to workplace communication, one of which is to ensure that communication is accessible.

In addition to the question of relative need, there is also the question of how far the curriculum should extend. As suggested in **section A3.2**, a 'narrow', functionalist reading of worker needs might suggest a narrow, functionalist curriculum. On the other hand, a more open-ended concern with the use of language, mathematics and other skills in the workplace, or with progression to other forms of adult learning, might well suggest a broader approach to the curriculum. In subsequent sections, we shall consider mathematics, ESOL and ICT and their respective claims to inclusion in the workplace basic skills curriculum.

The question of the scope of the curriculum raises issues about the *purposes* of basic skills provision. In a comparative study of Australia, the USA and the UK, Gardener (2001) has demonstrated differing emphases between countries. She points to the stress on 'new' high-skill workplaces and on skill needs across the workforce in Australia; and on the wider purposes of adult learning in the USA. In New Zealand, the emerging strategy emphasises the links between basic skills and other forms of workplace training, and the need to train supervisors and managers as well as workers in communication skills (Moore 2001). This supports the stress on improving the overall standard of workplace communications, as suggested above (**section A2**).

The scope for provision also covers the issue of information, advice and guidance. This is defined by the Guidance Council (1998) as:

> *Any process (or processes) which helps clients to explore a range of options about learning or work, to relate information to their own needs and circumstances, and to support decision-making about short and long-term goals and the identification of next steps.*

Guidance is therefore central to the development of workplace basic skills. Where provision is being made by publicly funded bodies such as colleges or local authorities, or otherwise funded from public resources, workers should have the same rights as those attending college or local authority community education to comprehensive information, and to independent advice and guidance. There are particular guidance issues for those who speak English as a second or additional language (Schellekens 2001).

A3.2 Basic skills and workplace change

Atkinson and Spilsbury (1993) attempt to draw general conclusions about the decline in the number of less skilled jobs across a range of industries. A more critical view, which raises important social and political issues, can be found in Jackson (2000), based on her research in Canadian workplaces. Other studies refer to specific industries, and there has been particular attention paid to computer factories in the Silicon Valley area of the USA (eg Gee, Lankshear and Hull 1996). These authors emphasise a new phase of 'fast' capitalism in which workers are first empowered, but ultimately controlled by techniques such as teamwork which stress worker initiative and flexibility. Hull (in O'Connor 1994) used ethnographic research methods to challenge stereotypical views of workplace literacy and illiteracy in terms of worker deficits that impact on company profitability and (ultimately) the national economy. Gelpi (1986) stressed the need to address workplace change with more imaginative and creative approaches to worker education, in which education and training programmes are 'informed by' rather than 'determined by' the workplace.

Commentators such as Ecclestone (1999) note the progressive tendencies in current policies. In brief, they identify how adults with low basic skills are more likely to be unemployed and dependent on state benefits, or if in employment, more vulnerable to losing their jobs as technologies evolve or economic conditions worsen. While she applauds the link between lifelong learning and social inclusion, she also regrets the continuing tendency to locate the 'problem' of basic skills in individual educational shortcomings, rather than in wider shortcomings of the education and training structures

in the UK. In particular, she points to what she describes as the 'crisis-ridden pessimism of ... policy which suggested that individuals should take responsibility for meeting the demands of global competitiveness or suffer the consequences.' In her view, workers are not responsible for economic change and should be supported in their learning projects rather than blamed for their low levels of basic skills.

A number of studies, most recently Machin *et al.* (2001), have used material from the UK's National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the IALS to argue that those with low literacy levels have higher rates of unemployment, or if employed, earn less than other workers. There has been comparable work in Canada (Bloom *et al.* 1997) and Australia (Pearson 1996; ANTA 1997). The assumption of these studies is that workers with less developed basic skills will get 'left behind' by the pace of workplace change. On the other hand, Robinson (1997) has launched a sustained attack on this point of view, arguing that it will take 40 years for the demand for skilled labour to meet the supply, even assuming no improvement in school achievement levels. Trowler (1998) has also pointed to the ironies of this situation.

In the USA, Sticht, himself a proponent of workplace basic skills programmes, has more recently suggested that there may be a 'skills surplus' rather than a 'skills deficit' (2000a). There is, of course, the possibility that arguments against the existence of a 'skills gap' may be seen as arguments to do nothing. In other words, the core workforce (predominantly male and full-time) would continue to receive lifelong education and training in increasingly demanding jobs, while the peripheral workforce (predominantly female and part-time) received little or no training (Payne 1996). Gardener (1997) has emphasised the discriminatory impact of such a scenario and argued convincingly for 'learning programmes based on full citizenship of an information-loaded society, not merely limited and ineffective levers of labour market change.' This link between basic skills and active citizenship is now appearing with more frequency in the policy literature in the UK.

There is now an extensive literature which links the issue of workplace basic skills with changing workplace practices. It is difficult to come to any firm conclusions: generalised accounts may not apply to particular cases, while it may be unsafe to generalise from accounts of specific workplaces. Change affects some workplaces more than others, and rates of change are variable.

A3.3 Basic skills and ICT

In **section A1**, we raised a number of issues about how the definition of basic skills relates to the modern workplace. In 2002, the position in the UK reflects the complex reality of funding and accountability for basic skills (literacy and numeracy), ESOL, key skills and ICT. As we suggest in this section, however, there is evidence that providers, in order to meet the present needs of workers and their employers, may need to show some flexibility in their definition of workplace basic skills. An evaluative study (Payne 2000a) conducted in one training and enterprise council (TEC) area, for example, showed that 68% of 509 participants in a project for basic skills in SME workplaces were doing ICT-related courses, 27% were doing 'communications' and less than 1% were doing 'literacy support'. The author concluded that:

> *Rather than this being seen as a 'back door' method of identifying literacy and numeracy problems (though this can and will happen), the IT focus should be a primary one in future work by the project. The most obvious skills divide in the workplace at present is not between those who can or cannot perform [standardised] literacy and numeracy tasks ... but between those who can and cannot operate a personal computer.*

While similar reports have not been available from other TEC areas, it raises a strong possibility that successful practice in this field may use a flexible definition of workplace basic skills. As pointed out in Frank and Hamilton (1999), this emphasis on perceived workplace needs also fits in with the strand in the Moser Report (1999) which emphasises adult interests:

> *We need to attract adults at key stages of their domestic and working lives, with campaigns that link to their current needs and aspirations [their emphasis], and which offer a solution through improving their basic skills. Promotion campaigns need to excite potential learners in the context of work, helping their children, getting a particular qualification, dealing with everyday life, and being more involved in the community.*

Bigum and Green (1992) suggested there were four ways in which literacy and technology were linked:

- technology for literacy (using ICT materials to teach literacy)
- literacy for technology (meaning the literacy required to access the technology, eg an instructional manual)
- literacy as technology (writing itself is a technology)
- technology as literacy (the common phrase 'computer literacy' implies that this is a whole new literacy in itself).

Frank (2001) has adapted this schema to her own work on ICT and literacy. The workplace students she interviewed felt that they had a right to access to ICT facilities. They were already conscious of the extent to which ICT was transforming the world in which they lived (both inside and outside work) and did not want to be left behind.

A BSA/University for Industry (Ufl) report on the motivation of adults to improve their basic skills found that personal and everyday reasons for improving basic skills outweighed work-orientated motives (BSA/Ufl 2000). Linking literacy and numeracy to ICT is a motivation to learners, a methodology of learning and an important workplace skill in its own right. This also comes over in the Third Report of the National Skills Task Force (DfEE 2000a) in relation to the developing learndirect (Ufl) network of learning centres:

> *One important function for these learning networks would be to provide learning opportunities for some of the least skilled amongst the workforce, which could be particularly difficult for smaller firms to provide in isolation. For example, they could offer literacy and numeracy provision, which might also be usefully combined with IT literacy.*

A3.4 Basic skills and key skills

Other commentators have approached the need to broaden the concept of 'basic skills' by linking it to 'key skills'. A survey of 120 employers in one county in the mid-1990s showed literacy and numeracy as just two of a range of 'key skills' required by employers, with 'Communications' and 'Working with People' topping the list. This matches the findings of the 1998 *Skill needs in Britain* survey (cited in BSA/UfI 2000), which found literacy and numeracy at the bottom of the list of 'skills reported to be lacking in employees'. Howard and Taw (2001) have produced a manual to support work with employers based on a 'key skills' approach.

The importance, in practice, of a much broader approach to basic skills is implicitly acknowledged by the BSA itself in a recent publication with the subtitle 'Improving the basic skills of public sector workers' (Davies and Byatt 2000). It lists 'ten basic skills needed in the public sector': this appears to accept the need for an 'applied' definition of basic skills in the workplace; for example, 'talking and giving information to members of the public' and 'time-keeping and working within time constraints'. The actual examples and case studies from public-sector employers, in turn, reveal a broad approach to the development of less skilled staff.

A3.5 Basic skills in the context of broader training

There is a particular issue in relation to the general educational skills needed to support adult employees working towards NVQs in the UK and similar technical and professional qualifications in other English-speaking countries. In this case, the Australian experience, which has been extensively written up (Sanguinetti and Wignell 1998; ALNARC 2000), is a good starting point.

In the UK, the emphasis on workplace basic skills must be considered alongside the relatively low level of training activity in the workplace. While the Moser Report (1999) refers to the low level of interest among employers in workplace basic skills training, this can be usefully compared to the view in the 2000 edition of *Labour Market and Skill Trends*, based on the best possible evidence, that 'There does not appear to be a training culture for a large number of employees, and what training there is, is focused more on younger workers' (DfEE 2000b).

It is not just that some workers are at a disadvantage because of low basic skills, but that these same workers may get reduced access to other forms of vocational training. Bynner and Parsons (1997), in a study based on the NCDS cohort, found that:

> *58% of men and women in the very low literacy group had* never *been on a training course, [as compared to] 30% of men and 43% of women in the low group and 25% of women and 20% of men with good literacy skills. [emphasis as in original]*

Thus the '*silent scandal*' [emphasis as in original] of low levels of literacy and numeracy referred to in the Moser Report (1999) has to be seen alongside the related problem of the paucity of development opportunities available for workers (especially those who have low skills to start with), and in particular, the lack of opportunities for low-skilled women at work.

In this context, narrowly focused basic or key skill training at college or in the workplace is unlikely, as Brown and Keep (1999) have argued, to contribute towards positive attitudes to lifelong learning in adulthood. They propose instead a broader educational content to vocational education and training (VET) and draw unfavourable contrasts between the UK and countries such as France, Germany and Japan. Wolf (2000) concurs with this view, in relation to the specific area of mathematics education.

A3.6 English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and 'other languages'

For the purposes of this review, the term ESOL refers primarily to those already in the workforce whose English does not meet the BSA definition of 'the ability to read, write and speak in English ... at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general'. They include longer-term migrants and refugees, as well as shorter-term migrant workers from other European Union (EU) countries. They range from people who are illiterate in their first language to those who have high-level skills and qualifications. Schellekens (2001) emphasises that many second-language speakers have to accept employment below their real level of skill.

It is also important to emphasise that speakers of English as an additional language have a significant advantage over many first-language speakers of English because of the other language or languages they already speak. Such language abilities have particular relevance in occupational areas such as social or health work with other non-English speakers of that language group, and in business and public service for correspondence or interpreting in other languages.

The close interrelationship can be seen in bilingual literacy schemes such as that in Sheffield. The Sheffield Black Literacy Campaign has created opportunities for young people to help their elders in learning English, while in turn receiving support in their use of their own first language and the cultural traditions associated with that language and its use (Gurnah1993). Bellis and Awar (1995) have reported on their work with refugees, using a bilingual approach in the classroom. These refugees often have higher-level skills which are useful in the economy, once the language barrier is broken. Gardener and Janssen (2001) have reflected on their work in training interpreters in London to mediate between professional staff and bilingual communities.

It is important to recognise that these perspectives are often shared between the various English-speaking countries, with significant work on both English as an additional language and on bilingualism carried out in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

In the UK, ESOL has for many years received less support than adult literacy or numeracy. The inclusion of ESOL in the UK government's 'Skills for Life' strategy is welcome. In her comparative review of literacy in UK, Australia and the USA, Gardener (2001) has pointed to the 'missed opportunity' to give ESOL equal treatment alongside literacy work, as has happened in Australia (Pearson 1996). Taylor (2001) has made a strong plea for ESOL to be given equal status alongside other basic skills. ESOL is implicit in some government-funded schemes; for example, some Trade Union Learning Fund projects (see **section 3.8** below).

At the same time, equal treatment does not imply the same treatment. Three particular features of ESOL are noteworthy here:

- the amount of time it takes to achieve fluency in a new language
- unemployment and underemployment make it difficult to tackle this task through the workplace alone
- there are separate training needs for ESOL tutors, in and outside the workplace.

Finally in this section, it should be noted that this report does not deal with the particular bilingual requirements of workplaces in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

A3.7 Mathematics

While the term 'literacy' has a 'tried and tested' feel about it, the term 'numeracy' is seen by some to refer only to a limited meaning of 'arithmetic and number sense' (Tikly and Wolf 2000). They prefer the term 'mathematics', 'because it transforms people's ability to conceptualise and structure relationships, to model the world and to change it.' Chisholm Caunt (2001) uses a broader definition of numeracy which involves the 'practical application of Maths' and also the development of 'critical numeracy' which includes understanding advertising claims and government statistics.

Whether we are dealing with numeracy or mathematics, the area remains underdeveloped in relation to the workforce and workplace. There is a general tendency on the part of employers to complain about the poor mathematical skills of employees. Yet even where basic skills in the workplace projects are active, there seem to be very few courses which address mathematical needs directly. In part, this may be because employers see it as the role of schools to produce numerate employees. Yet there must be many existing employees whose general workplace skills are not matched by mathematical skills and could therefore benefit from workplace education and training in mathematics. In addition, being 'bad with numbers' does not have the social stigma of poor reading and writing, so it should be much easier to persuade workers to volunteer for such courses.

Developments such as calculators and computers may well have reduced requirements for simple calculations (numeracy). But Wolf (2000) has suggested that they have increased rather than decreased mathematical needs in the workforce, by allowing firms to introduce 'new, more efficient techniques and working patterns which make use of these machines, and call for new levels of mathematical and statistical understanding.' Hoyles and Noss (2000) have exemplified this, in relation to investment banking, in developing training which linked banking and mathematical practices together in computer models designed jointly by tutors and students:

> *Our challenge was to find ways of encouraging the bankers to think about their familiar practices in ways which included the mathematical, rather than by replacing them by 'mathematics'.*

Another example of such a unified approach, which prepares workers for future, as well as present, workplace needs, is Fitzsimons' work (2000b) with an Australian pharmaceutical firm. In this instance, the 'calculations' modules of the accredited training scheme were felt to be irrelevant to industrial needs.

The future of mathematics in the workplace involves both research and development and tutor training, given that there is already a shortage of school mathematics teachers. Fitzsimons (2000a) has proposed a way forward, based on linking research-based mathematics theory with pragmatic adult teaching experience. Benn (1997) has developed a series of interesting proposals for ways forward in teaching mathematics to adults. These would build on the ways that adults actually use number in everyday life (hence the title, *Adults count too*) and establish links between these practices and academic mathematical knowledge. Benn emphasises the particular importance of this approach for women, many of whom were discouraged from learning mathematics at school by a sense that it was an 'unfeminine' activity. However, further work is required to relate these perceptions more closely to the workplace.

A3.8 Basic skills and trade unions

A variety of materials have been produced under the overall heading of 'Basic skills are union business'. In this report, these are referenced together as TUC/BSA (2000) and consist of a summary, a video, a general guide and sectoral guides for eight major employment areas (eg manufacturing). There is also a handbook for providers (Gathercole and Kelly 2000) and an illustrated booklet of case studies (Stubbs and Struk 2000). The TUC/BSA material follows a standard format. Evidence on the extent of the problem, the relationship between skills and jobs, and the cost to industry are presented under headlines which include the word 'fact' – although, as we have seen, there is not general agreement among researchers on these facts. The reasons for workers, unions and employers getting involved are presented, and the 'unique role of the unions' is explained. Prominence is given to the role of trade union learning representatives, the Trade Union Learning Fund, partnership as a way of working, and the issue of 'readability' of written material in the workplace. The issue of 'readability' is not dealt with elsewhere in the literature of workplace basic skills, and emphasises that workplace literacy is an issue that affects the whole organisation rather than just those workers identified as having low basic skills (see **section A3.1**).

A somewhat different emphasis comes across in Gathercole and Kelly (2000). They emphasise the importance of trade union learning representatives and the strong government will to respond to problems of low skill levels. There is useful material on assessment, curriculum and delivery, materials, quality, sustainability and expectations. This booklet is very positive about the motivational and curricular support that ICT can offer. This emphasis fits in well with good practice being developed in the Trade Union Learning Fund basic skills projects (TUC/BSA 2000). Allen and Rogers (2001) have reported on a successful basic skills project in Somerset for manual workers in a local authority where ICT was used as part of the marketing strategy. At the tuition stage, two groups were formed, one around basic ICT and one around reading and writing. This project has also included training tutors from colleges in the county with additional input on the role of trade unions. It is also worth noting that the TUC case-study booklet (Stubbs and Struk 2000) has seven case studies, three of which include ICT, while another includes ESOL.

In many ways, the trade union approach to basic skills reflects a rather different starting point to other work in this area; in particular, in its concern about the low level of training being provided for low-skill workers. This creates a context in which basic skills are seen

as only one possible strand in adults' learning projects, as in the Ford EDAP scheme (Beattie 1997) and the UNISON Return to Learn programme (Kennedy 1995; Munro, Rainbird and Holly 1997). There is a stress on the important role of trade union learning representatives, both in encouraging members to take up learning opportunities and offering them learning support. Within this work, guidance in relation to basic skills is recognised as particularly sensitive, and additional material has been prepared for learning representatives (TUC 2001). As with the readability issue, references to the issue of guidance for basic skills are not frequent in the literature on workplace basic skills.

Other writers and researchers have been less enthusiastic about trade union involvement in basic skills, seeing it as a form of incorporation of trade unions into management concerns. For Breier (1997), both employers and organised labour may be over-stressing the utilitarian values of the paid work economy. Hoddinott (2000) regards trade union support for workplace basic skills as 'problematic', given that literacy and numeracy levels can be used by employers as a reason for either not recruiting workers or sacking existing ones, in jobs where the real literacy and numeracy requirements are minimal. She argues for greater equality in general training opportunities for less skilled workers, including training that recognises such barriers as shift work, in a way which resonates with the UNISON and Ford EDAP experience, and with the findings of Frank (1996).

A3.9 The perspective of employers and employees

This brings us to the question of what might constitute effective basic skills from the point of view of the worker, and how this agenda might begin to square with a comprehensive lifelong learning agenda. We highlight this issue here in the knowledge that the 'user perspective' is increasingly being seen as an important influence on government policy, and that educational providers need to take this into account at all times. As Mulholland and Duffen (2001) have commented:

> *As practitioners and professionals, we are learning how to listen to those who use the service and those we are trying to attract. Learning Partnerships already have the responsibility for consultation. Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) have a remit for promoting lifelong learning and it will be crucial for these ... bodies to consult current learners and to ensure that those not yet enrolled as learners have a say in shaping provision in the new landscape.*

In this instance, it is worth noting that what may be secondary outcomes for organisers and funders may be primary outcomes for users. For example, Noel's (1998a) evaluation of workplace basic skills projects in Oxfordshire reaches the surprising conclusion that 'senior managers are more impressed at the development outcomes of the programme (eg interest in learning and confidence) and impact on staff retention rather than associated improvements in job skills.' Frank's (1996) follow-up study of workplace literacy students suggested a very wide range of outcomes in both the workplace and in other domains of workers' lives. This point is also exemplified by research into outcomes in New Zealand (Benseman and Moore 2000).

Frank and Hamilton (1999) provide a useful model of what they call 'domains' in the workplace literacy curriculum. The basic skills student is seen as a whole person, as in any other form of basic skills intervention. Learning should allow them to:

- carry out their present job
- get their next job
- do their next job
- cope with periods of unemployment and official bureaucracy
- take part in community/political activities
- access education and training
- support their children at school
- take part in leisure activities, write letters, use ICT.

Mace (1992) takes a similar view of the matter, in a way that emphasises that while the interests of employers and workers may coincide over learning, they are never identical. A similar view can be found in Forrester, Payne and Ward (1995). Moore (1996) suggests that workplace practitioners may be more aware of conflict of interest than common interests. Caldwell (2000) emphasises that the workplace should be considered as a 'site' for learning, as education and training moves increasingly out of institutional bases such as colleges. In so far as workplace basic skills are the subject of public policy, they must take account of workers as citizens with a wide range of learning interests, as well as workers. In this context, a policy such as paid educational leave (Mace and Yarnit 1987), which is supported in the Moser Report (1999) for a very limited range of courses, becomes a live policy issue again (Monks 2000).

A4 The effectiveness of basic skills programmes

Measuring effectiveness

Concern was expressed in May 2001 at the LSDA expert seminar that existing research and evaluation of practice did not lead to a straightforward 'action list' to establish effective practice in this field. A number of reasons for this were offered, including:

- a relative lack of interest in the field by academic researchers
- the absence of a framework for collating the experience and outcomes of local projects in this field
- the absence of an agreed methodology for measuring effectiveness.

Effectiveness, in any case, presupposes an agreed set of outcomes, or criteria for measuring outcomes. Yet, as we have made clear, while employers, workers and the wider society all stand to benefit from workplace basic skills projects, the precise benefits for each group are not identical. Sticht (2000b) has used the expression of 'double duty dollars' to describe the ways in which learning and the benefits of learning may flow over from one context to another – in this case from workplace to personal, family and community life. Even within the workplace itself, effectiveness may be judged by a number of measures (Frank and Hamilton 1993; Forrester, Payne and Ward 1995):

- literacy and numeracy gains by individual workers
- individual gains in confidence and motivation
- improved communication skills, leading to more effective new working methods, such as teamwork
- more effective job training.

We also have little information about the relative effectiveness of basic skills provision in differing economic sectors, and between large and smaller employers. For example, in 1998, enterprises employing 50 or fewer staff made up 99% of all employers, accounted for 45% of all employment, and for 38% of turnover (DfEE 2000b).

Factors determining effectiveness of workplace basic skills learning programmes

If we assume that ineffective schemes are less likely to be reported than effective schemes, it follows that considerable information is available about good practice, although there is no systematic collection of evaluative data.

In compiling the following list, we have drawn on the outcomes of the LSDA seminar held in May 2001. We have also drawn on a list produced by Workbase (New Zealand) for use with employers (Workbase 1999). Further sources include: Frank and Holland 1998; Noel 1998a; Payne 2000a; McHugh 2001. No single scheme will necessarily demonstrate all these features. Each successful project or scheme is different precisely because it moulds itself to local circumstances.

Factors determining the effectiveness of workplace basic skills learning programmes:

- working with the grain of the overall political climate, policy initiatives and funding streams [LSDA seminar]
- partnerships that reflect local circumstances rather than an externally imposed model, but which include a close working relationship with at least one local provider [LSDA seminar/Workbase NZ]
- basic skills are considered as part of the firm's overall training and development programme [Workbase NZ]
- the acceptance that improvement in basic skills involves a considerable time commitment, especially for those with the lowest levels of skill [LSDA seminar]
- a curriculum which is a 'rough guide' to learning activities rather than a blueprint, which reflects the 'real-life' use of literacy and numeracy in the workplace, and uses teaching materials based on those real-life activities [Workbase NZ]
- involvement of workers and (where relevant) their trade union representatives in the workplace strategy, probably within an advisory group to plan and monitor learning activities [LSDA seminar/WorkbaseNZ]
- clear, visible support for the programme from senior management [LSDA seminar]
- effective guidance for learners, involving (where appropriate) trade union learning representatives and local guidance agencies [LSDA seminar]
- the conduct of a learning needs analysis [Workbase NZ]
- marketing within the workplace which fits in with worker interests and priorities, and uses positive titles such as 'communication skills' to promote learning programmes [Workbase NZ]
- provision which is free to the worker/student, and is offered in working time [LSDA seminar]
- evaluation linked to forward planning of ongoing learning opportunities [LSDA seminar]
- the offer of accreditation where this is required [LSDA seminar].

A5 Who writes about basic skills and with what purpose?

This section looks at the people and organisations that write about workplace basic skills and the range of purposes they have for so doing. It provides a background to the coding system used to categorise the publications listed in **Part B** of this survey. A case study is provided under each heading.

Academic researchers

Academic researchers write about basic skills in the workplace for a number of purposes and audiences. They may be contributing to academic debate, be commissioned by a government department or other external agency to report on particular issues or evaluate particular workplace schemes, or be contributing to debate and training among practitioners.

Their writing is published in a number of different formats:

- book-length works in which basic skills in the workplace may be only one of a number of topics covered; for example, Hart 1992
- substantial articles published in academic journals; for example, Ecclestone 1999; or chapters in edited books; for example, Hoddinott 2000
- full-length research reports; for example, Frank and Hamilton 1993
- more popular accounts which aim to disseminate research findings and ongoing research interests; for example, Frank 2000a
- reports for government departments or agencies; for example, Atkinson and Spilsbury 1993
- reports for national organisations concerned with workplace basic skills issues, which may or may not receive government funding; for example, Mikulechy, Albers and Peers 1994
- papers presented at conferences, usually to a predominantly (but not exclusively) academic audience; for example, Castleton 1997. These may be published in conference proceedings or posted on a variety of websites
- unpublished academic theses; for example, Fitzsimons 2000a.
- training and development materials, such as those produced by the Workplace Basic Skills Network (WBSN) based at the University of Lancaster (Frank and Holland 1998).

Case study: the University of Lancaster

The University of Lancaster has been involved with literacy issues for many years through its multidisciplinary Literacy Research Group, based within the departments of educational research and of linguistics. It is especially linked to the concept of 'situated literacies' or 'new literacy studies'. Through the Centre for the Study of Education and Training (CSET), the University of Lancaster has been involved in research in workplace basic skills for at least 10 years. Approaches used are predominantly qualitative, and particular attention is paid to the testimony of student-workers, obtained either through interviews or student writing. This led to the setting up of the Workplace Basic Skills Network in 1993. Based within CSET, the network draws together researchers and practitioners from across the UK, and has brought academic researchers into direct contact with a range of government agencies with an interest in this field. The University of Lancaster website also plays host to the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy group (RaPAL) (see below).

Government departments, agencies and contractors

In the UK, this would begin with publications of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), previously the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The DfES funds, directly and indirectly, a number of other UK agencies, and has varying degrees of control over their activities, which include research. The following list should therefore be treated with some care, as the exact relationship between each agency and government is different.

- Basic Skills Agency (BSA) publications: the authors may be directly employed, or be consultants or academics contracted to carry out a particular piece of work (a point which applies generally in this section).
- Research organisation, such as the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER); for example, Brooks *et al.* 2001.
- The National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), a membership organisation which promotes itself as the national organisation for adult learning.
- The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), a strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training.

Case study: Basic Skills Agency (BSA)

The BSA is the major agency charged with implementation of government policy on basic skills. It was previously known as the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU). Its change of name in 1995 reflected a change of remit to include schools. The BSA reports present research findings in a very readable way, generally omitting technical and methodological matters, and summary versions are usually available free of charge. These reports have been very influential in relation to basic skills in the workplace, documenting the extent of basic skills needs, and the continuing problems these cause for workers through their working lives. The 'official' nature of these reports is reflected in the fact that although authors are generally identified within the publications, their names are not usually given on the cover of the publication. In this report, BSA publications are usually referenced under the names of the author(s). The approach to research is largely quantitative rather than qualitative. *Basic Skills* is a termly magazine, with well-illustrated articles covering all aspects of basic skills from pre-school to adults. It carries occasional articles dealing with the workplace.

Practitioners/organisers/tutors and membership organisations

Few practitioners, organisers and tutors write about their work. As we make clear in **section A6**, this is a serious weakness of the present situation in terms of the relationship between research, policy and practice. The views of this group and the outcome of their practice are filtered, if at all, through the lenses of academic researchers who take an interest in this field, and through organisations such as the Research and Practice in Adult Literacy group (RaPAL) which link academics and practitioners via journals, meetings and conferences. While RaPAL has an excellent record of publication and dissemination which is reflected in this report, there is always a tendency for the academic interests to dominate. A similar organisation exists for numeracy teaching – Adults Learning Mathematics (ALM) – but it tends to have a lower profile outside academic circles. The strength of such organisations varies from country to country. For example, in Australia, an information kit on incorporating literacy and numeracy skills into training packages published by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) was published in 1998 (Sanguinetti and Wignell 1998). Two years later, the academic/practitioner-based Australian Literacy and Numeracy Research Consortium (ALNARC) published research findings which questioned both the success and the validity of such an approach (ALNARC 2000). They were able to do this by drawing on information supplied by six state-based research centres in the network. In 2000, the original publication (Sanguinetti and Wignell) was revised.

Case study: Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL)

RaPAL is the main organisation in the UK linking academic researchers and practitioners. It is committed to a dynamic relationship between research and practice. RaPAL campaigns for the rights of all adults to have access to a full range of literacies.To this end, it produces commentaries on official publications and responses to consultations. RaPAL publishes regular bulletins, together with occasional publications (including conference reports), several of which are referenced in this report. It holds an annual conference which includes its AGM. Its current concerns are to challenge popular myths about literacy, to contribute towards the professional training of staff, and to take a more active part in national debates about literacy. A number of its most active members are involved in basic skills in the workplace as researchers, managers or teachers.

Worker–students

One of the more interesting features of workplace basic skills in the UK is the amount of information we have about workers who have 'taken the plunge' and taken steps to improve their basic skills. Such information comes from three main sources:

- the extension of the emphasis on student writing in literacy tuition to the workplace. Thus the research reported in Frank and Hamilton (1993) also spawned a video and a book of student writing under the general title of *Not just a number*. More recently, Frank (2001) reports a similar approach to learners taking first steps with ICT
- other writers have made extensive use of the direct words of worker–students recorded in interviews; for example, Forrester, Payne and Ward (1995) in the UK, and Gowen (1992) and Clasby (1997) in the USA
- the use of witness statements in official publications and videos; for example, the *Basic skills are union business* video (TUC/BSA 2000).

Case study: Not just a number

The conventional research report (referenced in this report as Frank and Hamilton 1993) includes workplace case studies, a survey of employer attitudes, a discussion of benefits and blocks to setting up basic skills training in the workplace, an outline of the issues, and recommendations. It is complemented by a video and by a book of student writings: *Not just a number: writings about workplace learning*. This is writing by manual workers about work, about learning at work, and about the importance of writing and learning in people's lives. One woman writes, for example: 'I think that on shop floors all over Britain there are workers who have talents that lie dormant because they are not given the opportunity to find out what their capabilities are.' Types of writing include prose, poetry and work diaries. The book also demonstrates how conventional workplace courses can be complemented by an opportunity to step back from the immediate pressures of the workplace – in this case, a writing weekend held at a residential centre. Chapter 4 ('Thinkers') summarises these workers' views about learning and would be directly useful to organisers trying to set up basic skills courses for manual workers.

Unfortunately, such approaches have not been used in a systematic way, and results, while illuminating as illustrations, are not comprehensive enough to be used as the basis for policy decisions. As we shall show, however, in **section A6**, current policy is not especially well informed by more quantitative approaches either. Given the current importance attached by government to involving the 'user' voice in policy formation and decision-making in relation to health, education and other public services, this does suggest that a more systematic approach to gathering qualitative data might be adopted.

Table 4 summarises the differences between these different types of writer in terms of output, emphasis and impact on practice and policy.

Table 4

Writers	**Output**	**Emphasis**	**Impact on practice**	**Impact on policy**
Academic	High	Qualitative	Moderate	Low
Government agencies	High	Quantitative	Moderate	High
Practitioners	Low	Qualitative	Low	Low
Student–workers	Low	Qualitative	Low	Low

A major priority for the future is to develop an effective research and development (R&D) loop which would feed information back from practitioners, learners and academic researchers to government decision-makers, to ensure that policy and subsequent practice are evidence-based.

A6 Future research needs: towards evidence-based practice

Introduction

The new National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy came into operation early in 2002. It is appropriate, then, to identify future research priorities which could contribute towards the development of evidence-based policy and practice. By this we mean practice informed by reliable evidence on what works and why.

In **section A1**, we summarised the present research position in the UK in the following terms. This is now repeated with examples.

- Academic research has shown little interest in the issue of workplace basic skills. For example, there were no projects on this theme in the ESRC's major 'Learning Society' research programme in the 1990s, and there have been no recent articles in *Studies in the Education of Adults*.
- There has been no consistent effort to 'capture' local knowledge about what works and what does not work in this field, although there have been initiatives in this area by individual colleges and local authorities and TECs. The evaluation of the impact of the projects within the Building Basic Skills in the Workplace initiative (McHugh 2001) should provide more evidence of this type. The collection and archiving of locally produced reports is an urgent priority. There is also an urgent need to develop an overall framework within which research can be carried out, findings collated and disseminated, and implications for effective practice absorbed.
- Weak research findings continue to be quoted as truth long after they have been shown to be problematic (eg ALBSU 1993; Robinson 1997; TUC/BSA 2000). In general, there is insufficient robust research evidence to inform policy developments. The paucity of evidence uncovered by Brooks *et al.* (2001) is a case in point. Although there are lessons to be learned from other countries, the context is very specific in each country. While many of the issues that define the context of basic skills in the workplace (globalisation; higher skill requirements) operate across nation states, education remains an area for action by national governments. Nationally-based research therefore creates a context for nationally-based discussions and actions by government, employers, providers, trade unions and other agencies.

The lack of a systematic approach to the theory/practice interface and to the capture of lessons from practice is particularly a problem, given that positive outcomes of projects are not always identical to objectives, and that meanings (both positive and negative) can vary for different stakeholders – employers, workers, trade unions, government agencies, educational providers and so on. Frank (2000b) has offered a comprehensive framework for research in this area which is worth further exploration. This takes account of the likely purposes and audience for research, its focus and the issues (sub-themes) to be addressed, the range of perspectives and methodologies that can be adopted. It is clear that a range of quantitative and qualitative approaches are required in order to assess both the extent of current practice, its outcomes and its effectiveness (or otherwise). In addition, continuing theoretical input is required to ensure that the field of

basic skills in the workplace is framed in such a way that policy decisions address the most pressing issues.

Towards 'evidence-based policy and practice': how to capture 'local knowledge' and good practice

It is quite clear, when surveying the literature, that other countries have more developed approaches to professional development, the collection of empirical data and research projects coordinated by both government agencies and academic institutions. In the UK, evaluative evidence was collected from the government-funded Basic Skills at Work programme 1991–95, and published by ALBSU (1995). The links between this and subsequent policy decisions seem tenuous, with decisions having been made largely at local level by the TECs. While some of this work has been evaluated locally (see, for example, Payne 2000a), there is no information about the scale of what has been achieved, or about what has simply failed and disappeared from public view. It is important that a similar fate should not befall the evaluation of the Building Basic Skills in the Workplace initiative (McHugh 2001). Our argument is that much of the information we need has been available, but we have had a significant problem in gathering and collating it. That information is required in order to formulate future directions for policy and practice in basic skills in the workplace. There is a need for clear mechanisms that enable potentially useful research findings to inform policy development and practice in a more systematic way.

Clearly, given the indirect nature of policy implementation in the UK (ie its dependence on local agencies and partnerships), many agencies might be involved in both the collection and analysis of research data and the implementation of evidence-based policy and practice. Key partners in the policy-loop process might include:

- The Basic skills Agency (BSA)
- The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)
- The National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE)
- The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and National Training Organisations (NTOs), which can reflect the views of their employer members
- Educational providers that promote and/or evaluate basic skills in the workplace projects
- Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs: both national and local)
- Sub-regional lifelong learning partnerships
- Membership organisations and networks such as RaPAL and the National Association for Teaching English and other Community Languages (NATECLA) which are repositories of local knowledge and good practice, as well as having a direct interest in policy-making
- Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)
- Trade unions at both national (TUC and affiliates) and regional levels, including the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), of which many practitioners are members
- Workbase, an organisation with the longest single record of commitment and achievement in this area, including a wide range of open learning publications
- Workplace Basic Skills Network, a national organisation for providers of workplace language, literacy and numeracy provision.

Contact details for these organisations are given in **section B3**.

The establishment of the Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit and the commissioning of the new National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy creates a context in which the serious shortcomings in the present situation might be addressed. These two bodies are in a position to coordinate expertise and knowledge from national agencies, but also to create regional frameworks through, for example, the RDAs. At this level, constructive relationships might be developed with academic staff in the regions, who could support local practitioners in planning and undertaking research, including evaluation of local practice and knowledge-gathering activities.

A powerful element of the work of the new national centre will be research reviews that will feed into the development of evidence-informed policy and practice at the DfES. One of the threads running through this particular report is the fact that the research field of basic skills is hampered by an unnecessarily restrictive view of basic skills in national policy-making which does not appear to correspond to either needs or practice on the ground. The reality of the workplace, where both employers and workers have to deal on a day-to-day basis with new skills demands, can introduce a fresh note of realism into this debate.

It is especially important that there should not be an unnatural division between the collection and gathering of empirical data and the development of theory in the universities. To be useful, theory needs to engage with practice. That engagement must be with both quantitative data (numbers of learners, existing skill levels and projected skills needs in the labour force) and qualitative data (the factors that motivate learners, the perceived benefits for learners and employers deriving from literacy, numeracy and other basic skills programmes in the workplace).

The important point was made at the LSDA expert seminar in May 2001 that evaluative research can only evaluate what happens in practice; and that those activities which happen in practice happen because they are enshrined in policy. This point can be summarised as three interlocking statements:

- policy determines practice to a large extent; in particular, through making funding available for certain kinds of activities and not others
- evaluative research is restricted to actual practice
- the results of evaluative research are restricted by the original policy.

Therefore we also need theoretical research that can suggest alternative policies and practices. Theoretical research can also help us to understand the unexpected consequences of policy and practice; such understandings may also emerge from evaluative research where researchers are specifically briefed to look for such unintended consequences.

Future research needs

1 Impact

- What is the impact of workplace basic skills programmes on learners and companies, including issues of motivation and retention of workers?

2 Issues of practice

- The first priority is for research that can speak directly to providers about how different the institutional context is when basic skills are a workplace issue rather than a college issue, as Gathercole and Kelly (2000) have noted. We need to know more about effective partnerships with employers and trade unions, how schemes are best marketed, what kind of guidance is appropriate.
- What is 'effective practice' in a variety of settings? Evidence might include detailed independent evaluation of the Trade Union Learning Fund basic skills projects, and other development projects, including both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.
- The nature of the workplace curriculum needs a lot more work: there will be narrow workplace priorities in each workplace, but workers' aspirations are very complex. How can these demands be reconciled to the satisfaction of both employers and workers?
- How should we address the issue of 'readability' of written material in the workplace as part of a 'whole organisation' approach to workplace literacy?
- Are there particular difficulties in conceptualising workplace mathematical/numeracy needs, which are inhibiting improvement in the mathematical skills of the employed workforce?
- To what extent is workplace education and training identifying the particular needs of ESOL learners in the workplace and engaging them in programmes?
- How important is our developing understanding of informal learning in the workplace for basic skills development? And how much of this informal learning is negative – ie workers finding out what they cannot do and developing strategies to hide deficiencies?
- What are the employment and learning needs of people with learning difficulties and disabilities? There is a substantial literature on the employment of adults with learning difficulties and disabilities, much focusing on the skills – such as interpersonal skills – required for work, but very little that relates specifically to literacy or numeracy skills.

3 Issues of policy

- What are the basic skills needs of refugees and asylum seekers?
- What is the significance of bilingualism for the UK skills base?
- How can we best meet the education, training and lifelong learning needs of low-skilled workers in the context of the continuing, but reducing, supply of low-skill jobs in the UK economy?
- What are the theoretical and practical dimensions of redefining basic skills to include ICT and ESOL?
- What is the impact of policy imperatives on providers?

4 Issues of infrastructure

- What sorts of contact between firms and providers exist at local levels, how effective are they, and how might they be promoted further?
- What kind of funding structures will enable firms and providers to meet basic skills needs in the workplace?

- How is it possible to increase capacity in providers while enhancing quality of provision?

5 Challenges for research

- How can we measure effectiveness of workplace basic skills provision?
- How can we involve more universities and other research organisations in this field?
- How can we support providers and practitioners who wish to carry out their own research at a local level?
- How can we improve the access of researchers to the workplace as a research site by developing networks that include researchers, employers and trade unions?
- How can researchers build on existing training needs analyses and feasibility studies?
- How can we develop comparative research, and the exchange of research findings, both internationally and within the EU?
- How can we ensure that research data is archived in such a way that it can be retrieved easily?
- What are the relative roles of national organisations and regional research networks in this developing research arena?
- How can we ensure that longitudinal studies are carried out to assess the longer-term impact of programmes on employers and workers, as well as 'snapshot' surveys of what is happening at a particular moment in time?

Part B

B1 References

These are references to all publications referred to in the text of **Part A** of this report. If there is an entry in the annotated bibliography (**section B2**), the reference at the end of the entry will indicate in which section it is to be found.

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B2 A selective, annotated, English-language bibliography

The coding system used

Publications do not always fit neatly into tidy categories such as 'academic' or 'government'. We have therefore adopted a system which allows for each publication to be placed in one or more categories. These categories are:

- academic – material produced by academics predominantly for academics
- educational – material produced by academics, government agencies and practitioners primarily for practitioners
- industrial – material produced by (or directed at) businesses and trade unions
- government agency – government publications and material produced by agencies drawing a substantial part of their funding directly from government.

When two or more categories are used, this allows us, for example, to identify as both *academic* and *educational* a publication based on *academic* research, but directed towards *educational* practitioners. In a similar way, BSA publications are usually put down as *government* and *educational*, because they come from a *government*-funded agency, but are directed at practitioners.

In addition, the nature of each publication is suggested; for example, *report, book, booklet, article (*journal articles and conference papers), *chapter* in edited books, *training materials, video*). In general, items included in Holland with Frank and Cooke (1998) are not repeated here, with the exception of a small number of important texts. These are marked as *key texts*. There is an indication of the country/ies referred to for each entry. Not all annotations are original, and the source is acknowledged where relevant. The source *Literacy and the new work order* refers to Holland with Frank and Cooke (1998) in **section B1**.

The organisation of this section

There is a broad match between the organisation of this bibliography and the analytical material in **Part A** of the report:

- 'Approaches to workplace basic skills' corresponds to **section A2**
- 'The extent of need' covers **section A3.1**
- The next five sections reflect **sections A3.2** to **A3.6**
- 'Outcomes and effectiveness' relates to issues raised in **section A4**
- Finally, 'professional development' is a small but important area that is highly relevant for managers and practitioners in the field.

For the purposes of cross-reference between **sections B1** and **B2**, these sections are numbered consecutively.

B2.1 Approaches to workplace basic skills

Barton D and Hamilton M (1998). *Local literacies*. Routledge.

An example of the 'situated literacy' approach in practice. Detailed study of literacy practices in one English town. The book argues that people characteristically use a complex mixture of oral and written communication in their everyday lives, including the workplace.

Academic
UK
Book

Batt S and Pegum S (2001). *Checklist for employers considering workplace language, literacy and numeracy training*. Workplace Basic Skills Network.

A useful checklist, designed to support employers new to the provision of language, literacy and numeracy in the workplace by providing a framework for the selection of suitable providers. It addresses issues of quality, the range of basic skills programmes required, management of provision, costs and evaluation. The document can be reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged.

Educational
UK
Checklist

Breier M (1997). Literacy strategies among unschooled workers. In *Globalization, adult education and training: impacts and issues*, (ed) S Walters, 201–212. Zed Books/National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

The chapter describes a research project (Social Uses of Literacy or SoUL) which adopted a 'new literacy studies' approach to actual literacy practices. Fieldwork was conducted in schools, on farms, and among taxi drivers. Suggests a learning strategy which looks at how literacy is used in particular jobs, builds on existing literacy strategies of workers, discards the deficit model, and uses written texts that are already part of people's life experience.

Academic; educational
South Africa
Chapter

Brooks G, Giles K, Harman J, Kendall S, Rees F and Whittaker S (2001). *Assembling the fragments: a review of research on adult basic skills*. Research report RR220. Department for Education and Employment.

An NFER survey of recent research on adult basic skills, but by no means comprehensive. It includes both analytical material and bibliographical references. Two pages out of 179 refer specifically to the workplace. The authors note the lack of continuity after the government-financed Basic Skills at Work projects of 1991–94.They quote the Moser Report (1999) in support of the view that 'workplace provision is regrettably limited'.

Government agency
UK
Report

Castleton G (1997). Recognising the virtual and virtuous realities of workplace literacy. *Literacy Broadsheet*, 48, 3–7. ERIC EJ562151

'The functional literacy discourse ignores the ideological role of literacy in society and enables workers to be blamed for poor economic performance. A more meaningful concept of literacy at work includes understanding workplaces as communities of practice and inclusion of the voices and experiences of workers.' (source: ERIC abstract) See also Castleton G (2000). Workplace literacy: examining the virtual and virtuous realities in (e)merging discourses on work. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 21(1), 91–104.

Academic
Australia
Article

Frank F (2000b). Researching workplace basic skills policy in the UK – ways, and means, to an end: towards a comprehensive model of research methodologies. Further Education Research Network (FERN) conference paper.

Proposes a comprehensive framework for research 'taking note of the likely audiences as well as the possible different foci of the research, the range of different perspectives that could be taken, the different methodologies which could be used, the different overviews which could be taken within the research, the issues which could form the "sub-themes" of the research and the likely purposes of this type of research' [emphasis as in original]. There is some discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of particular approaches. The author notes the policy context of an expanded interest in issues of basic literacy and numeracy in the workplace.

Academic; educational
UK
Article

Frank F and Hamilton M (1999). Whatever next? Policy and practice in workplace basic skills in the UK.In *Researching work and learning: a first international conference*, (eds) K Forrester, J Payne and K Ward, 631–644. School of Continuing Education, University of Leeds.

Reviews basic skills as part of the lifelong learning agenda of the UK government. Defines two key perspectives: 'Firstly, as enhancing and underpinning workplace training which might already happen; and secondly, as providing an "outreach" setting so that the kind of basic education that currently takes place in community settings can happen in another convenient setting where learners find themselves: at their workplace.' The authors propose a 'whole person' approach to workplace basic skills. The article contains a critique of the Moser Report tasks as being tasks most people could easily avoid.

Academic
UK
Article

Frank F and Holland C (1997). The politics of workplace literacy. In *Lifelong literacies: papers from RaPAL's 1996 conference*, (eds) S Fitzpatrick and J Mace. Gatehouse Books.

Notes the absence of a research basis for UK practice, and suggests a number of fundamental questions: Who benefits and in what way from workplace provision? Who is responsible for agenda-setting? Why should literacy workers get involved, and with what aims — for example, functional or empowerment? The authors conclude that there is a need for an alternative to the 'deficit model' in order to market courses successfully.

Academic; educational
UK
Article

Gelpi E (1986). Creativity in adult education. *Adult Education*, 59(3).

'Emphasises imagination and creativity rather than a narrow view of competence; and the need also for adult education to be "informed" rather than "determined" by the workplace.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 22) Written while Gelpi was working at UNESCO and employs a broad, humanist view of the workplace and of worker education.

Academic; inter-government agency
International
Article
Key text

Hamilton M and Barton D (2000). The International Adult Literacy Survey: what does it really measure? *International Review of Education*, 46(5) 377–389.

The paper assesses the contribution of the IALS to understanding literacy, in terms of the perspective of the 'new literacy studies'. The critique is mostly concerned with the validity of the test. Three criticisms of the survey methodology are made: it provides only a partial picture of literacy; it treats culture as some kind of bias; the test items do not represent real-life situations, as claimed. The article urges the case for complementing the IALS methodology with other research perspectives.

Academic
International
Article

Hamilton M, Macrae C and Tett L (2001). Powerful literacies: the policy context. In *Powerful literacies*, (eds) J Crowther, M Hamilton and L Tett, 23–44., National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

Criticises the IALS methodology for measuring (il)literacy levels: 'It has framed the terms of the debate, defined the scope and content of "literacy need", who is deficient in

literacy and why, and denied the central role of culture and relationships of power in determining literacy needs and aspirations...'. The UK government's agenda is seen as based on a 'standardised definition of literacy that is linked to formal educational structures and methods of assessment at both initial and post-school levels', but overlaid with concepts of lifelong learning and social exclusion. The link between policy and research is seen to be very weak. Contains a useful list of contacts.

Academic; educational
UK
Chapter

Hart M (1992). *Working and educating for life: feminist and international perspectives on adult education.* Routledge.

The key passage for workplace basic skills is in chapter 5, 'A widening skills gap?'. Hart notes that the policy literature of workplace basic skills has failed to engage with the sociology of work literature. She criticises the notion that because skills levels are rising, there is a 'crisis' about the literacy levels of the adult population. She believes that literacy should be considered apart from possible economic problems: 'This does not take away any importance from the fact that a high number of people are lacking basic literacy skills – but this is a problem that needs to be discussed and addressed in its own right rather than misinterpreted as a danger to productivity and economic growth.' The author then observes that 'In general, numbers of workers involved, as well as the actual skills requirements, are entirely blown out of proportion', before identifying a serious problem in the 'design and organisation of work' that does not draw on workers' skills and abilities. She accepts the need to tackle the low levels of literacy, but sees this as a societal rather than an individual problem.

Academic
USA
Book

Holland C (1999). Talking about border crossings: workplace literacy practitioners in three Commonwealth countries. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Lancaster.

A comparative study of workplace basic skills in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. 'Central to this study of approaches is the concept of "empowerment" and what that means at a site ("border crossing") where education comes to industry. ... I conclude that practitioners need a range of underpinning knowledge and theory to understand and negotiate the shift into workplace delivery and to engage with workers in ways that make a difference to the way they interpret and create their own worlds as well as others' words.' (source: thesis abstract) In chapter 5, the author takes each country in turn and measures it against a battery of questions and issues.

Academic
Australia, New Zealand, UK
Thesis

Human Resource Development Canada (1998). *Workplace literacy bibliography (L'alphabetisation en milieu de travail)*. National Literacy Secretariat. ERIC ED423406

Lists projects, reports, learning materials etc found in the library of Human Resource Development Canada (164 items in both French and English). Covers a wide variety of workplace basic skills topics, including: certificates in workplace education; curriculum; marketing; assessment; needs assessment; basic education in the workplace; basic skills for the workplace; changing workplace; communication skills; distance education; programme evaluation; functional literacy; programme implementation and development; health and safety; student recruitment; transfer of learning.

Government agency
Canada
Bibliography

Jackson N (2000). Writing up people at work: investigations of workplace literacy.In *Working knowledge: productive learning at work*, (ed) C Symes, 263–72. Conference proceedings. University of Technology Sydney.

The focus of the author's interest is the actual working practice of front-line workers and the role of texts in their lives. The ubiquity of text in the workplace is seen as a form of work intensification and control over workers. In particular, quality procedures are seen as text-driven. She argues that 'The source of the "literacy problem" at work lies not in the functional skill deficits of individuals, but in the workplace social relationships...'. Conflict and mistrust continue to characterise labour relations. Training is seen as a response to 'paperwork avoidance' in the workplace, but even when this does not achieve desired results, there is no will to look for solutions in the power relations of the workplace. The author proposes that 'literacy' education at work should focus as much on supervisors and managers as on workers.

Academic
Canada
Article

Levine K (1986). *The social context of literacy*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

'Outlines differences between competence studies of literacy, contextual, and critical–cultural studies and develops a critical–cultural approach. Identifies five major component dimensions: linguistic, technological, individual, distributional and socio-cultural.... Describes the Nottinghamshire Literacy Scheme, commenting on job prospects, recruitment requirements, and selectors' negative stereotypes which equated, or strongly linked, low literacy with low intelligence. Describes political philosophies related to literacy – ie as a right (left) and as a duty (conservative) and a shift to literacy as an economic value. Relates literacy to workplace skills development.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 36)

Academic
UK
Book
Key text

McCulloch A (1997). Theorising literacy policy: 'Literacy at work'. *Literacy and Numeracy Studies: an International Journal in the Education and Training of Adults*, 7(1), 63–76. ERIC EJ562141

'Examines the Australian Language and Literacy Council's paper, *Literacy at work*. Concludes that it concerns not only achievement of social and economic objectives but also the question of acceptable forms of governance and the state's intervention in economic and social life and the organisation of the workplace.' (source: ERIC abstract)

Academic
Australia
Article

Moore L (1996). Workplace literacy: issues and trends in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In *The fourth sector: adult and community education in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, (eds) J Benseman, B Findsen and M Scott, 177–192. The Dunmore Press.

Moore outlines the development of workplace literacy education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, exploring the context in which it has emerged as a policy priority, and the issues highlighted by its existence. On the one hand, there have been workplace changes, such as de-layering, that have increased literacy demands on workers; on the other hand, there has been an increased drive to link education and economic prosperity. She adopts a stakeholder analysis approach which views different groups as wanting different outcomes from workplace literacy programmes. The result is that 'practitioners are engaged in a process of working through apparent conflicting interests and perspectives'. She recommends an approach that focuses on the total communication needs of an organisation and targets managers and supervisors as well as workers.

Academic
New Zealand/Aotearoa
Chapter

Moser C (1999). *A fresh start: improving literacy and numeracy*. The Moser Report. Department for Education and Employment.

This is a UK government report which considers the question of how to raise levels of literacy and numeracy in the UK. The report proposes that workplace basic skills programmes should be funded on a par with other courses in colleges, and that students below Level 1 should have a right to paid educational leave. Trade unions would be encouraged to make a contribution – in particular, through the work of the trade union learning representatives and through the Trade Union Learning Fund. The government is urged to set up a research programme to provide 'a systematic basis for the proposed strategy' (recommendation 21).

Government agency
UK
Report

Noel A (1998b). Methods of approaching basic skills at work. In *Basic skills and further education: communities confront linguistic elitism and social exclusion*, (eds) A Frankel, L Millman, F Reeves, 207–213. Bilston College Publications/Education Now.

Reviews Basic Skills at Work projects in Oxfordshire. Finds that 'the word *basic* is a non-starter' [Noel's emphasis]. Key skills get a better response from training managers, and she then defines this as 'job skills' – the actual uses of literacy and numeracy in the workplace. For publicity, 'training opportunities' is a preferred term. 'We only use the terms basic education, literacy and numeracy when writing reports for the TEC [Training and Enterprise Council] and on enrolment forms for the Further Education Funding Council'. Funding needs to be on a longer-term basis with a specific unit established, rather than focused on short-term project work, especially because lead-in times can be quite long. The actual work steers a compromise between the job-related tasks and the concepts of 'education for empowerment' or 'education for everyday life'. Workplace basic skills projects can and do act as a springboard for further training at work or at college.

Educational
UK
Chapter

Stephens K (2000). A critical discussion of the 'new literacy studies'. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48(1), 10–23.

Defines the 'new literacy studies' and offers critical commentary on a number of aspects. Stephens argues that some aspects of literacy can be considered independent of social context; that literacy contributes to access to the world of stored cognitive knowledge (for example, through books); that 'To recognise and respect the language of the home and community and respect the learning capacities of minority communities is not necessarily to rule out a role for correctness and correction in the process of schooling'; and that there is 'a role for evaluative judgements within a professional educational discourse about literacy.'

Academic; educational
UK and USA
Article

Sticht T and Mikulecky L (1984). *Job-related basic skills: cases and conclusions.* National Centre for Research in Vocational Education.

'A pioneer of the functional context approach in the workplace, Sticht describes it as "...instruction design using materials, books, tools and language of the working environment adjusted to the knowledge and experience of the student." Claims that this approach is more economical and more efficient than teaching decontextualised basic skills first then tying them to job skills. Discusses costs of establishing literacy programmes in the workplace, but is enthusiastic about outcomes. Maintains that where workers have used job-specific materials to improve reading skills, effects of instruction proved less susceptible to attrition over time.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 51)

Academic; educational; industrial
USA
Report
Key text

Street B (1997). *Adult literacy in the United Kingdom. A history of research and practice.* Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL).

A wide-ranging study of the approaches and concerns that have informed literacy studies and practice in the UK from the 1970s onwards. A number of important research findings ignored in recent years, but relevant to the subject matter of this review are recovered; for example, in Jones and Charnley (1979). *Adult literacy: a study of its impact.* National Institute of Adult Education. 'An important finding of the NIAE research was the variability among those who came forward: the stereotype of "illiterates" as unemployed and incompetent was challenged by the discovery that about half were in relatively skilled occupations.' Street maintains that part of the importance of the 'social literacy' movement has been to emphasise the complexity of experience people have of literacy. Conflicts between employment-orientated tasks and the wider objectives of literacy tuition are identified from the 1980s onwards.The lack of consistent research interest in the field is regretted. Street also notes the consistent interest in basic skills by trade union educators.

Academic; educational
UK
Report

Street B (2001). Contexts for literacy work: the 'new orders' and the 'new literacy studies'. In *Powerful literacies,* (eds) J Crowther, M Hamilton and L Tett, 13–22. National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

There are dominant and alternative discourses relating to education. These should be viewed in the context of the 'new orders': work (flexibility; quality; teams); communicative (reading and writing in relation to other uses of language and other technology – ICT); knowledge (there are now many sources of knowledge). Street proposes an approach to literacy work 'in terms of newer and broader understandings of both literacy and language that take account of these contexts'. He argues that the National Literacy Strategy in the UK deals with surface features of language and literacy (such as spelling and grammar). This is only one view of 'basics' – there is a more creative alternative which corresponds more closely with the demands of 'change, variety and variation' in new workplaces.

Academic
UK
Chapter

B2.2 What workers want

BSA/UfI (2000). *Getting better basic skills – what motivates adults.* Basic Skills Agency.

Research conducted by MORI, based on 672 people who claimed to have experienced some difficulties with basic skills in their lives. 'The questionnaire focused on people's perceptions of their own skills, their motivation for improving their skills, their access to learning programmes, the content of the programmes and what would encourage them to improve their skills.' Fifty-four per cent referred to mathematics, 33% to spelling, 23% to writing, 17% to reading. In terms of motivation for trying to improve basic skills, personal and everyday reasons outweighed 'in order to get a job' and 'to perform better at work'. The main obstacle was 'too busy' (51%), with 'unable to get time off from work' at 17%. There was a reluctance to consider workplace courses: among full-time workers, 30% would like a work-based programme, but 64% would not; for part-time workers, 28% would and 68% would not. Computers were seen as a strong motivational pull: 'The factors that would most motivate adults to improve their basic skills are being able to learn on a computer (50%), being able to improve computer skills and basic skills at the same time (49%), getting a qualification (50%) and being able to attend a course near home (50%).'

Government agency
UK
Report

Caldwell P (2000). Adult learning and the workplace.In *Training in the workplace: critical perspectives on learning at work*, (ed) H Rainbird, 245–263. Macmillan.

Emphasises the importance of the workplace as a site for a variety of learning: 'The development of workplace learning is very significant within this perspective. The workplace can provide a site for learning that is convenient and accessible and an opportunity to learn with peers; and it links in with, and builds upon, the motivation for self-improvement provided by employment. In addition the workplace may provide an infrastructure of support for learning: not just space, materials and equipment, ways of organising access to teachers and advisers, but also support from fellow workers, managers and union representatives.' Builds on the experience of the Ford EDAP and UNISON Return to Learn schemes. It contests the view that different 'levels of education' are appropriate for different 'levels' of worker.

Academic; educational; industrial
UK
Chapter

Forrester K, Payne J and Ward K (1995). *Workplace learning: perspectives on education, training and work.* Avebury.

A general book on learning in the workplace, looking at developments in the policy and practice of workplace learning. It contains a lot of empirical data on the gains for both employers and workers from broad education and training schemes (usually called employee development schemes) based on the workplace. Chapter 5 ('The missing millions') looks, in particular, at the large numbers of people who do not participate in

any form of workplace education and training. It presents both social justice and economic arguments for regarding the needs of less-qualified and less-skilled workers as a priority. There is a case study of successful basic skills provision by three public sector employers. It concludes that '...basic skills education and training can answer employers' requirements for higher levels of basic skills in the workplace; they can also help to develop and sustain internal labour markets; additionally, they can improve the general quality of life for people both as individuals and in the communities in which they live and work.' (See also *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 15, for more general comments on the book.)

Academic; educational; industrial
UK
Book
Key text

Frank F (1996). *Like a cork shooting out of a bottle: students' learning journeys after workplace basic skills training courses. A follow up study.* Centre for the Study of Education and Training, University of Lancaster.

This report is a longitudinal study of students who took workplace literacy courses and return-to-study courses in 1991/2, as reported in Frank and Hamilton (1993: report, book and video). While these studies had not been 'life-changing' for all students, many had continued to develop study interests both related to their jobs and to their other interests. There were positive and long-term outcomes in both work and other areas of life for most participants. She notes that finance continued to be a barrier preventing some adults from studying. It is also clear from the report that changes in company policy, as well as economic fortunes, can rapidly change companies' levels of commitment to basic skills. Frank records two particular problems regarding future development of workplace basic skills courses: (1) a narrowing, work-related curriculum which is prejudicial to the wider educational benefits that participants recorded; (2) short-termism on the part of colleges, funding agencies and companies, which is not helpful to either firm or employees.

Academic; educational
UK
Report

Frank F (1998). Workplace literacy: not just for the bottom line. In *Basic skills and further education: communities confront linguistic elitism and social exclusion*, (eds) A Frankel *et al.*, 218–221. Bilston College Publications/Education Now.

Refers to the Kennedy Report (1997. *Learning works.* Further Education Funding Council), which called for 'training for life' rather than a 'job for life'. Emphasises the importance of a student-centred approach: 'There is a place for practising writing accident reports, or learning the techniques for plotting production graphs. But the courses can, just as easily, address the needs of the students as members of a family and of a community; as union members; as job seekers as well as job doers; and as citizens.' In other words, 'training for life' must mean something more than the immediate job needs. 'It is helpful to be able to transfer the principles of good adult education over to the workplace and to let the students' needs dictate the content of their course.'

Educational
UK
Chapter

Frank F (2000a). Workplace basic skills network. *Literacy Today*, December 2000, 21.

Statement of the position of the Workplace Basic Skills Network on a number of issues: 'In addition to improvements in technical competence', workplace basic skills training should lead to: 'increased self-esteem and confidence; an enjoyable experience of structured learning; acquisition of independent transferable learning skills; improved prospects and greater employability; improved ability to reflect critically upon, understand and develop communicative processes; increased ability to participate actively in workplace and community activities through improved communications. 'There should be benefits to workers in other domains of their lives: current job, next job, periods of unemployment, community political activities, leisure activities, support for children at school, access to education and training. The author recommends a methodology of teaching that is 'participatory and consultative' and calls for proper training for workplace tutors.

Educational
UK
Article

Frank F and Hamilton M (1993). *Not just a number: the role of basic skills programmes in the changing workplace*. University of Lancaster.

'Investigates current developments in workplace schemes for adult basic skills training in the UK, and explores the attitudes of employers and others towards these developments. Identifies the conditions under which successful models may be implemented. Includes overviews of worker education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and outline workplace case studies, a survey of employer attitudes, a discussion of benefits and blocks to setting up basic skills training in the workplace, an outline of the issues, and recommendations. Concludes that basic skills in the workplace does not exist in a vacuum, that it is an interdisciplinary topic, related to management and union concerns' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 79). There is also a book of student writing and a video with the same title.

Academic; educational; industrial
UK
Report/book/video
Key text

Mace J (1992). *Talking about literacy. Principles and practice of adult literacy education*. Routledge.

'Argues that literacy for employment, in reality, comprises many kinds of literacy, depending on the job, the organisation and the economic context of the work: and what an employer thinks they may need their employees to be able to read and write at work may not be what those people think they want to be able to do. Asserts that the full range of literacy purposes and possibilities available to any of us has barely been described, let alone promoted. Adds that while the benefits of literacy remain vague, the

disadvantages and difficulty of investing time in acquiring it are sometimes overpowering. Distinguishes between "indispensable" and "desirable" literacy'. (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 41)
Academic
UK
Book
Key text

Mace J and Yarnit M (eds) (1987). *Time off to learn: paid educational leave and low paid workers*. Methuen.

'Fifteen contributors. Includes contributions also from adult education students. Documents some of the initiatives which have enabled people in low paid jobs to access training. Points out that, by way of seminars, conferences and the like, salaried employees receive paid educational leave (it is part of the job) but such privileges are denied to hourly paid workers, who must train in their own time. Concludes that Paid Educational Leave (PEL) is an important strategy for getting adult education to more of the people for whom it is intended.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 39)

Academic; educational
UK (plus contribution from Italy)
Book
Key text

Stein S (2000). *Equipped for the future content standards: what adults need to know and be able to do in the 21st century*. National Institute for Literacy. Also at: http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/standards_guide.pdf)

Equipped for the future occupies a similar position in the USA to the Moser Report in the UK, but both its origin and approach are different. It has been developed from a widespread sample of individuals and groups, [with research] carried out between 1994 and 1997, covering many of the roles adults play in life, of which paid work is just one. Gardener (2001) comments: 'Two features of this catch my attention: one is the willingness to trust what adults themselves say that they need to learn and be capable of. The framework has a strong bias towards practical applications of communication and other skills, but it also recognises that people want and need to know things to carry out their civic and working lives satisfactorily … The other is that "literacy" and "basic education" have vanished from the title. They are present in the framework but alongside other goals.' A report by Juliet Merrifield on the research phase is available at http://www.nifl.gov/collections/eff/merrifield_eff.pdf

Government agency
USA
Report

B2.3 The extent of need

Andrade de Souza Descardeci, MA (1997). *Resources of communication: a study of literacy demands in a Brazilian workplace*. PhD thesis. Institute of Education, University of London.

A detailed ethnographic study of workplace literacy in the town hall of a Brazilian city. 'The specific aim is to raise suggestions about the design of an instrument for the selection of workers which is compatible with the real communicational demands of the workplace'. She argues that 'Past understanding of literacy has resulted in decisions inside workplaces which have not always reflected real needs with respect to communication'. 'This thesis demonstrates that 'literacy testing methods chosen by the Brazilian Town Council she studied were not related to literacy demands at the workplace and failed to select satisfactory workers.' (Frank 2000b).

Academic
Brazil
Thesis

Atkinson J and Spilsbury M (1993). *Basic skills and jobs: a report on the basic skills needed at work.* Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit.

Research conducted by the Institute of Manpower Studies for ALBSU. A second volume (*The basic skills needed at work: a directory*) can be used to identify the basic skills needs of particular jobs. Research attempted to cover the 'bottom two thirds of jobs' according to skill level, and 1.3m out of 15.6m manual (operatives and craft), personal services, sales and secretarial/clerical jobs. Based on a 35% response rate to a postal questionnaire. Only one in 10 employers described their employees' basic skills as 'only just adequate' or worse. Despite this, the authors conclude that 'Our results suggest that the range of jobs open to jobseekers with poor basic skills is very small and shrinking'.

Government agency
UK
Report

Brain S and Hughes M (1999). *Learning to progress: developing basic skills for the workforce in Central London.* Further Education Development Agency/Central London Training and Enterprise Council.

A report on basic skills needs in a sample of 51 SMEs in Central London. The survey also attempted to assess likely take-up of Individual Learning Accounts for this purpose. Half of these employers reported basic skills (including ESOL) needs. There was strong agreement over the importance of basic skills in the modern workplace, but disagreement over whether it was possible to 'get by' with poor basic skills on a day-by-day basis. Seven organisations already offered some basic skills support, in the firm's time, on the firm's premises, and paid for by the firm. They used either their own staff or brought in staff from outside to do the training. The report records that 'In general employees preferred on-site provision and a work-related approach and did not want to attend college-based provision.' The authors considered that colleges should identify a 'flexible range of basic skills for the workplace services' and market them to employers and employees; and launch a Basic Skills at Work service which made out the business case for this work.

Educational; government agency
UK
Report

Bynner J and Parsons S (1997). *It doesn't get any better: the impact of poor basic skills on the lives of 37 year olds.* Basic Skills Agency.

A survey of the National Child Development Study cohort at age 37, which complements the study of the same cohort at age 23 (Hamilton M (1987). *Literacy, numeracy and adults.* Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit). It suggests that low levels of basic skills produce ongoing problems in both personal and working lives. This group were more likely to be unemployed, low paid and much less likely to receive promotion and training. Fifty-eight per cent of men and women in the 'very low' literacy group had *never* [emphasis as in original] been on a training course. Of the 'low' literacy group, 30% of the men and 43% of the women had never received training. The link between low basic skills and social exclusion is further explored in Bynner J and Parsons S (2001). Qualifications, basic skills and accelerating social exclusion. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(3), 279–291.

Educational; government agency
UK
Report

Chisholm Caunt J (2000). Tough on basic skills: tough on the causes of basic skills. Issues for professional development in workplace basic skills. Further Education Research Network (FERN) conference paper.

Analyses how illiteracy has shifted from an effect to a cause of social problems: 'Historically, illiteracy has been seen as an *effect* of poverty, deprivation, unemployment, poor health, and low expectations. Suddenly, it has been re-diagnosed as the *cause* of social exclusion.' [emphasis as in original] The author shows concern about use of a deficit model, a curriculum based on schooling, and moves towards 'compulsory learning'. She asks on what ethical basis can basic skills be promoted to employers.

Academic; educational
UK
Article

Davies K and Byatt J (2000). *Public sector, public potential: improving the basic skills of public sector workers.* Basic Skills Agency.

The report points out that the public sector employs 5.8m workers, just over 20% of the UK workforce. It states that 'the basic skills of literacy and numeracy provide the building blocks for Key Skills and other vocational training.' The second section of the report contains valuable practical material from the public sector bodies whose work they studied. Section 3 is about needs assessment, and section 4 offers a practical guide to getting started – both top-down and bottom-up. The booklet seems to be aimed at employers (at one point it addresses employers as 'you').

Government agency; industrial
UK
Report

DTI/DfEE (2001). *Opportunity for all in a world of change: a white paper on enterprise, skills and innovation*. The Stationery Office.

A joint report from the UK ministries concerned with the economy (DTI) and learning (DfEE – now DfES). Within the second section ('A "people first" economy') there is a sub-section on 'Improving numeracy and literacy and engaging more adults in learning' It states that 'The government will launch a national basic skills strategy to tackle this silent scandal. Our national goal is to expand the horizons and capabilities of the millions of adults who have chronically weak literacy and numeracy skills and to engage more low qualified adults in learning.' The target is to reduce those with problems by 750,000 by 2004. Measures include a big increase in funding. The new Basic Skills Strategy Unit at the DfEE (now DfES) 'will put in place a new core literacy and numeracy curriculum for adults, new National Tests, better training for teachers and robust inspection arrangements.' The need for enhanced ICT skills is dealt with separately in this report.

Government agency
UK
Report

Ecclestone K (1999). Care or control?: defining learners' needs for lifelong learning. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 47(4), 332–347.

The author is concerned with the 'crisis-ridden pessimism' of public policy debate about the relationship of the economy and learning, particularly basic skills. Her own abstract states that: 'Concerns about non-participation in lifelong learning may indicate an emerging moral authoritarianism arising from pessimism about the future. Low expectations of potential for social progress, human agency and learners' motivation to take part in formal learning, exacerbate moves towards a 'minimalist pedagogy' regulated by government agencies and encourages the idea that lifelong learning should be compulsory for adults "at risk".' She also suggests that 'there are strong progressive possibilities in new discourses of inclusiveness, as well as spaces for inspiring and empowering learners, and for them to inspire and empower us!'

Academic
UK
Article

Robinson P (1997). *Literacy, numeracy and economic performance*. Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

Trowler (1998) states: 'Peter Robinson ... calculates that only 37% of jobs require literacy to GCSE grade C and above, and 50% of pupils already attain this level. It will take 40 years before demand meets the supply, even assuming that the pass rate at GCSE stays level. Education, therefore, may not be *the* central factor in improving Britain's economic performance.' [emphasis as in original] Robinson concludes that 'Over the long run the most powerful "educational" policy is arguably one which tackles child poverty, rather than any modest interventions in schooling'. He is critical of the economic rationale for 'investing' in basic skills. He uses the 1994–96 Skills Needs Surveys to show that 'only 4% of employers felt that their business objectives were being hampered by a lack of literacy and numeracy amongst their current employees.' Among the 18% of employers reporting a skills gap, only 23% mentioned basic skills, compared

with 57% citing management skills, 60% general communication skills, 58% personal skills such as motivation, and 59% IT. He concludes that 'Employers voice few concerns, because although a significant proportion of the adult population have modest levels of literacy and numeracy, for a large number of jobs at the middle and lower end of the labour market this is all that appears to be required by employers.'

Academic
UK
Report

Sticht T (1998). Moving adult literacy education from the margins to the mainstream of educational policy and practice. *Adult learning and literacy: a series of occasional papers*, issue 1. ERIC ED429235

The paper advocates a more central role for adult literacy in national educational reform activities. Its present position is seen as marginal. Reasons for placing adult literacy in the mainstream include the productiveness of workers: 'Four reasons why the adult literacy education system should move from the margins to the mainstream of educational policies are as follows: better educated adults produce better educated children, demand and get better schooling for children, provide better communities of learning, and are more productive for society.' (source: ERIC abstract)

Academic; educational
USA
Article

Trowler P (1998). *Education policy: a policy sociology approach.* The Gildredge Press.

A review of policy-making in education and the academic literature about it. The book also contains a number of case studies from within policy-making. This includes some relevant comments on the basic skills–competitiveness link, and the problematic evidence base for this.

Academic
UK
Book

B2.4 Workplace change

Castleton G, Ovens C, Ralston D (1999). *Understanding work and literacy: (e)merging discourses at work.* Research into Practice Series No 7. National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia. ERIC ED433458

'The nature and effects of current common understandings of the relationship between work and literacy were examined along with the typical design and objectives of workplace literacy programs for members of Australia's workforce. Special attention was paid to the following topics: changing demands of work and literacy at work as skill; new ways of work and new worker identities; effects of new discourses of and at work; current understandings of workplace literacy training; workplaces as "communities of practice"; opportunities for authentic workplace literacy provision; and mechanisms to access workplaces to promote literacy. It was concluded that, in addition to recognizing

the opportunities existing legislation provides for the marketing and development of appropriate workplace literacy training, those involved in the field of workplace literacy must acknowledge the shelf life of legislation that works for the benefit of all workplace participants.' (source: ERIC abstract)

Academic
Australia
Report

Davies C and Birbili M (2000). What do people need to know about writing in order to write in their jobs? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48(4), 429–445.

Applies US research on writing at work, and the relationship between the school/academic use of writing and the workplace use of writing to the UK. Fieldwork covers a range of jobs and also takes account of the way e-mail and the internet have introduced new kinds of writing, less formal and closer to spoken language. In relation to whether schools prepare students for work, they suggest: '...it really is not plausible any more to use a singular notion of prescribed standardised practices as the basis for learning to write in all the areas of life where writing matters.' The authors feel that there is a gap between the development of uses of writing and the *understanding* of the various uses of writing. [our emphasis]

Academic
UK
Article

Gardener S (1997). Adult basic education in the post-industrial world: jobs, gender and citizenship. In *Adult learning and power: report of the 1994 conference of the International League for Social Commitment in Adult Education*, (ed) V Mohorčič Špolar, 49–55. Slovene Adult Education Centre.

Argues that the literacy demands in order to get a job are greater than those required to do it, and that literacy levels are used as a filter to select staff. She notes that the assumptions about rising skill levels apply more to the core labour market, and not to the peripheral labour market in which many women do low-paid part-time work: 'More jobs exist for women without qualifications.' The author concludes that: 'We need much closer analysis, of an ethnographic rather than a statistical kind, of the nature of skill, literacy, numeracy and communication in the real context of real jobs...'.

Educational
UK
Article

Gee J, Lankshear C and Hull G (1996). *The new work order: behind the language of the new capitalism*. Allen and Unwin.

'Gee, Hull and Lankshear frame a concept of a New Work Order emerging within the new global capitalism. Discusses the rhetoric of "fast capitalism", the alignment of education and the new capitalism, visionary leadership, the paradox of control and flexibility. Presents a case-study [a knowledge-intensive computer firm in Silicon Valley,

USA] of the training and implementation of teams, analysing the meaning of worker empowerment and self directed teams. The overt hegemony in business strategy (loyalty, commitment, allegiance) is discussed. Argues for the need to go beyond simple immersion in communities of practice, to be able to reflect and critique them. Provides a "discourse map of society", particularly of schools and workplaces as communities of practice and potential sites of active learning.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 21)

Academic
International (especially USA and Nicaragua)
Book
Key text

Holland C with Frank F and Cooke T (1998). *Literacy and the new work order: an international literature review*. National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

At the time of publication, this constituted the definitive review of English-language material on basic skills and the workplace. The book consists of three parts. The first part has three essays addressing the literature related to themes of global restructuring of capitalism, high-performance workplaces and the concept of the learning organisation. The second part has an annotated list of books under 'type' headings (social science theory, management texts, research reports, policy documents, unions, current practice). Part 3 consists of an overall bibliography of all the texts referenced in the book, in alphabetical order, cross-referenced to both the annotated list in Part 2 and the text of Part 1.

Academic
International
Book/bibliography

Hull G (ed) (1997). *Changing work, changing workers. Critical perspectives on language, literacy and skills*. State University of New York Press. ERIC ED413515

This is a major collection of 14 papers about workplace education programmes as a response to changing workplace practices in the USA, any one of which might justify a separate entry in this review. The separate papers are by: Glynda Hull; Katherine Schultz; Judy Kalman and Kay Losey; Debby D'Amico and Emily Schnee; Sheryl Gowen and Carol Bartlett; W Norton Grubb; Marisa Castellano; Mark Jury; Charles Darrah; Juliet Merrifield; Oren Ziv; Jenny Cook-Jumpers and Karolyn Hanna; David Jolliffe; Sylvia Hart-Landsberg; and Stephen Reder.

Academic; educational; industrial
USA
Book

Hull G (1998). The changing world of work. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 42(1), 26–29. ERIC EJ571621

'Begins an international conversation among reading teachers and other literacy educators about the intersection of literacy and the world of work. Describes the complex

workplace literacy requirements of a front-line worker in Silicon Valley.' (source: ERIC abstract) See also Hull G (2000). Critical literacy at work. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 43(7), 648–652.

Academic
USA
Article

Johnson W and Packer A (1987). *Workforce 2000: work and workers in the 21st century.* Hudson Institute.

'Warns of a "serious gap" between new skills requirements, eg written, oral, Maths and problem solving abilities, and the poor skills of those entering the labour force. Charts the change in occupational structure and notes that even the least skilled jobs will require a command of reading, computing, and thinking that were once only required of professionals. Recommends employers should play a part in the training of their work forces, and maintains that education is no longer a social justice issue, but about international competitiveness.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 65)

Academic; industrial
USA
Report
Key text

McIntosh S and Steedman H (1999). *Low skills: a problem for Europe*. Final report. European Commission.

Based on findings of the NEWSKILLS project, which sought to document and analyse the supply and demand factors affecting workers without qualifications in European labour markets. The authors noted that this group received less employer training than more qualified workers (except in Germany). The actual numbers in this group declined during the study period, and their labour market position declined relative to national averages (ie more likely to be unemployed or inactive). Those in jobs were more likely to be employed in declining areas of the economy. The authors concluded that education policy should be framed in terms of minimum entitlements (not just based on years of education) and more flexible and diverse institutions of learning. 'European citizenship should be defined as entailing commitment from the individual citizen to investment in learning throughout life, matched by commitment to flexible and appropriate provision from employers, and public and private providers'. (source: report abstract)

Academic; inter-government agency
European Union
Report

McIntosh S and Vignoles A (2000). *The impact of basic skills on labour market outcomes.* Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

The authors argue that 'basic numeracy and literacy are the "building blocks" with which individuals can develop their working careers'. They regard the figures available on the 'cost' of low levels of basic skills to the UK economy as 'problematic'. They use two data sources – NCDS and IALS – despite methodological misgivings about both sets, which

do not always produce the same answers. They note that most of the basic skills impact on labour market outcomes is from enabling individuals to acquire higher educational qualifications. International comparisons on IALS show the UK (and English-speaking countries in general) to be well down the league table on both literacy and numeracy. But the impact of this in relation to earnings seems related more to high inequalities between wages in the UK and the US compared to countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands.

Academic
UK
Report

O'Connor P (ed) (1994). *Thinking work. Volume 1: theoretical perspectives on workers' literacies.* Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Coalition (ALBSAC).

Major collection of essays by authors including Gee, Hull, Gowen and Lankshear. 'In his introductory chapter, O'Connor warns of a "dangerous conservatism" in workplace basic skills theory, policy and practice. He discusses "fast capitalism" (post-capitalist new work organisation) and promoters of organisational change, the "new freedoms" for workers: core–periphery jobs, flexibility, technology, enterprise bargaining – all a means of controlling the workforce, increasing income inequality....In summing up, O'Connor urges educators working in the area of workplace literacy to "learn to read the world that workers inhabit, and to contribute to the development of learning responses based on that reading".' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 45)

Academic
International
Book
Key text

B2.5 The scope of workplace basic skills

ALNARC (Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium) (2000). *Building literacy and numeracy into training. A synthesis of recent research into the effects of integrating literacy and numeracy into training packages.* Language Australia.

Research by the six state-based research centres of ALNARC on the impact of integrating literacy and numeracy into training packages. 'Overall, the findings reveal that progress in implementing training packages and addressing literacy and numeracy in that context has been uneven.' The situation varies from little or no support to a 'high level of awareness'. The report concludes that literacy and numeracy need to be incorporated into quality procedures and that professional development and professional networks (exemplars of good practice) are required. The authors also underline the importance of flexible funding to negotiate and implement workplace schemes. They found that there was little use of ANTA materials, and confusion existed over whether literacy means functional measures of reading, writing, and number required in order to be assessed as competent, or if it covers 'broad generic communication skills'. A tension was noted between training as a 'quick fix' and as part of long-term investment by firms. The authors propose an alternative approach: 'to explore ways of including literacy and numeracy support and training in all aspects of training and organisational development strategies'.

Academic; educational; industrial
Australia
Report

Bigum C and Green B (1992). Technologizing literacy: the dark side of the dream. *Discourse: the Australian Journal of Educational Studies*, 12(2), 4–28.

The authors refer to four ways of combining technology and literacy: 'technology for literacy' (using ICT materials to teach literacy); 'literacy for technology' (meaning the literacy required to access the technology, eg an instructional manual); 'literacy as technology' (writing itself is a technology); 'technology as literacy' (the common phrase 'computer literacy' implies that this is a whole new literacy in itself). Frank (2001) has adapted this schema to her own work on ICT and literacy.

Academic
Australia
Article

Brown A and Keep E (1999). *A UK perspective on how well initial vocational education and training facilitates lifelong learning.* Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, Lahti, Finland, 22–25 September 1999. Also at http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001135.htm

The authors argue that neither the work context nor the relatively narrow approach to key skills (Communication, IT and the Application of Number) in vocational education are likely to contribute to positive attitudes to lifelong learning in adulthood, and that what is needed is a broader educational content to VET. An unfavourable contrast is drawn with France, Germany and Japan.

Academic; educational; industrial
UK
Article

Derrick J (2000). *Finding solutions: Tower Hamlets and City and Islington College ABE/ESOL development project.* Interim project report. City and Islington College.

Describes a joint project funded by the DfEE to take forward the Moser Report agenda in a number of contexts – college, community and workplace. Considers staffing implications within the college and issues for 'professional development across NTO [National Training Organisation] sectors'. Partnership is viewed as an important principle. Both colleges are developing basic skills in the workplace courses and pre-recruitment courses with large local employers (eg London Underground, Stagecoach, police). The project has also looked at the basic skills requirements of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).

Educational
UK
Report/article

Frank F (2001). Empowering literacy learners and teachers: the challenge of information and communication technology (ICT). In *Powerful literacies*, (eds) J Crowther, M Hamilton and L Tett, 144–154. National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

Based on the views of workplace students, in firms that were running employee development schemes, on the role of computers in their lives. They felt they were entitled to access to ICT facilities. The author notes that 'These learners' discussions of ICT as a day-to-day part of their daily life, resonates well with the "social practice" view of literacy.' She refers to discussion in the Moser Report on the motivational power of ICT and whether ICT itself should be considered a 'basic skill', and on the need for tutor training in ICT for basic skills tutors. The author concludes that 'It is important to see the literacy student as a whole person and to understand the role that literacy – and technology – play in their lives which are themselves structured by relations of inequality'.

Academic; educational
UK
Chapter

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)/DfEE (1998). *Key skills: the Wiltshire key skills project. A summary of the research undertaken, December 1996–March 1997.* Department for Education and Employment.

Based on a survey of 120 employers of different sizes and in different sectors in Wiltshire. They were asked about the skills and qualities that employers want in their workers. They were then presented with six key skills areas (Working with Others, Communication, Problem Solving, Improving Own Learning and Performance, Application of Number, Information Technology). Forty-eight per cent thought these skills had high relevance to recruitment and selection; 41% thought them highly relevant to training and development; 86% thought they had some use in both. Desired qualities for workers showed Communication top at 60%, followed by Working with People 45%, literacy 37%, numeracy 32%, initiative 32%, teamwork 30%. No questions were asked about IT.

Government agency
UK
Report

Sanguinetti J and Wignell L (1998; revised edition 2000). *Built in, not bolted on. Information kit for language, literacy and numeracy co-ordinators on incorporating communication skills into training packages.* Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

The kit explores the Australian National Training Authority training packages, industry standards and assessment, and the implications of these changes for language, literacy and numeracy trainers. Training packages are based on agreed competency standards. The work is based on the assumption that language, literacy and numeracy skills underlie all areas of work, to some extent. The kit attempts to deal with common questions about training packages asked by trainers.

Government agency
Australia
Training materials

Sefton R, Waterhouse P and Deakin R (1994). *Breathing life into training: a model of integrated training.* National Automotive Industry Training Board.

'This report documents the development and conduct of a series of pilot programmes based on accredited training in the Vehicle Industry, designed to support employee access, encourage successful participation and provide opportunities for language and literacy learning. Includes six detailed case studies which illustrate the application of the model of integrated training.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 118) The research was carried out as part of the WELL program – Workplace English Language and Literacy. Vocational training was being implemented for all non-trades workers, and 'Teething problems were beginning to emerge and ways were being sought to address the issues, including the literacy and language requirements of a largely multicultural workforce.'

Educational; industrial
Australia
Report
Key text

B2.6 ESOL and other languages

It should be noted that some of the UK references in this report and most of those from other English-speaking countries refer to bilingual learners as well as those for whom English is the first or only language. Gardener (2001) notes that in the USA and Australia, 'bilingual learners are assumed to be participating in the same framework'.

Aldridge F (2001). *Divided by language: a study of participation and competence in languages in Great Britain.* National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

'...shows the richness of the diversity of languages used at all levels, in Britain today. It analyses the different ways people learn a language, and how communities can benefit through the learning and teaching of languages. It highlights that adults in Britain's minority ethnic groups have fluency and ability to learn languages...' (source: NIACE catalogue). In detail, the report shows that ethnic minority adults are more likely to speak 2+ languages (45% compared to 11% of the white population). It is part of the need to survive in unfamiliar surroundings.

Educational
UK
Report

Bellis A and Awar S (1995). 'Come back when you've learnt some English': refugees, interpreters and teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages. In *Engaging with difference: the 'other' in adult education*, (eds) M Stuart and A Thompson, 27–38. National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

Reflects on a two-year ESOL course for Sudanese refugees in the Brighton area, emphasising ESOL as the acquisition of both a new language and a new culture. Students often had skills and qualifications, but not 'in English'. The teachers used bilingual methods in the classroom to reinforce students' self-image and cultural identity. The authors rejected a deficit model of ESOL in favour of an anti-racist approach: ESOL should be seen as a progression step, not as a ghetto. They consider that classes of this sort need to be run '...within a larger framework of educational provision, offering real choices to a diverse bilingual population. This is not just a question of basic rights but also of the under-utilisation of valuable resources. The Sudanese refugees ... have brought with them a wealth of skills, knowledge and experience which has so far largely been ignored by local employers and training agencies.'

Academic; educational
UK
Chapter

Schellekens P (2001). *English language as a barrier to employment, training and education.* Department for Education and Employment.

A report of research commissioned by the UK government into the needs of people whose first language is not English, to establish whether lack of English is a barrier to employment, and how far language teaching and other support was available for second-language speakers to access employment. The report reviews the attitudes and experience of 178 learners (only 5% of whom were in employment), as well as employers and educational providers. It shows that such people are excluded not just from the labour market, but also from community life and services. This research estimates that between 1m and 1.5m people in the UK lack the English-language skills required to function in society and employment. Often, second-language speakers have to take jobs below their skill levels because of lack of English. The report also emphasises the amount of time taken to achieve real fluency in a new language, and offers some examples of good practice, such as the well-established Birmingham Toolkit for English Assessment.

Educational; industrial
UK
Report

B2.7 Mathematics and numeracy

Benn R (1997). *Adults count too: mathematics for empowerment.* National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

'Examines the reasons for the low level of numeracy in our society. Written to encourage the development of a curriculum tailored to the priorities and lives of individuals, it provides a cultural critique of the elitist assumptions about mathematics and mathematics education. Challenges the view of mathematics as value-free and culture-free.' (source: NIACE catalogue)

Academic; educational
UK
Report

Fitzsimons G (2000a). Mathematics in the Australian VET sector: technologies of power in practice. Unpublished PhD thesis. Monash University.

There is no simple transfer from school mathematics (a universal set of tools, or tool-box) to workplace practices: 'Each conception of worker, workplace, and workplace competence must be situated, located in time and space, within a specific community of practice with its multiple relationships across social and cultural settings.' Using evidence from Australia and Europe, she argues that 'much of mathematical competence is also rendered invisible, but in this case under the guise of common sense'. Most practice is based on dubious evidence: 'Each of tne studies mentioned in this subsection confirms the need to question the research basis (if any) on which vocational mathematics curricula of the past and industry-based competency standards of the present are grounded.' She notes the lack of professional development in VET, and proposes a way forward based 'on a combination of research-based theory of mathematics education and pragmatic experience of teaching in adult and vocational education'. See also Fitzsimons G (2000). Mathematics and the vocational education and training system. In *Perspectives on adults learning mathematics: research and practice*, (eds) D Coben, J O'Donoghue and G Fitzsimons, 209–227. Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Academic
Australia and Europe
Thesis

Tikly C and Wolf A (eds) (2000). *The maths we need now: demands, deficits and remedies*. Bedford Way Papers No 12. Institute of Education, University of London.

A collection of seven papers covering the transition from mathematics as a school subject to mathematical skills required in post-compulsory education and in the workplace. In the first paper, Tikly and Wolf set out the case for using the term mathematics, rather than 'numeracy', which for them has a restricted meaning of 'arithmetic and number sense'. Bynner and Parsons parallel their extensive work on literacy by reporting on the impact of poor mathematical skills on employment and career progression. Wolf suggests that the advent of computers and calculators has actually increased mathematical demands on workers by allowing employers to use more sophisticated working methods. This point is exemplified in the paper by Hoyles and Noss which has an interesting case study of mathematics in investment banking.

Academic
UK
Book

B2.8 Trade unions and basic skills

Allen B and Rogers D (2001). *Levels up: union action on basic skills*. Trades Union Congress (TUC) Learning Services South West.

This is the first detailed account of trade union involvement in basic skills in the workplace. It reports on a successful project in Somerset for manual workers in a local authority. Interest in ICT, and training needs related to ICT of which workers were already aware, were used as a way of getting workers involved in the project. At the

tuition stage, two groups were formed: one concentrated on basic ICT skills and the other on reading and writing. This project has also included tutor training for colleges in the county with additional input on the role of trade unions, and special training for trade union learning representatives on basic skills issues. 'Freeway to Learning' is a model for engaging the workforce in basic skills work through their trade union representatives.

Industrial; educational
UK
Report

Hoddinott S (2000). The worker basic skills 'crisis': some industrial relations implications. In *Training in the workplace: critical perspectives on learning at work*, (ed) H Rainbird, 169–88. Macmillan.

'...a critical examination of the putative worker basic skills crisis and its impact on workers. It argues that the current consensus that workers' literacy skills are critically deficient in relation to the demands of their jobs has not arisen in response to a growing and manifest problem; on the contrary, it is a consensus which has needed to be constructed. For, though individual workers may indeed aspire to improve their educational credentials, there is little evidence to support the idea that workers' intellectual skills/educational qualifications are inadequate for the jobs they are doing; on the contrary, there is substantial evidence that workers in general possess qualifications beyond the requirements of their jobs.' She provides evidence for the 'underutilisation of workers' qualifications and skills' and sees public campaigns about workers' illiteracy adding to the general problem of job insecurity. She concludes that trade union support for workplace basic skills is 'problematic', before moving on to other elements of the union training agenda which she views much more positively. The aim should be to secure equality of training opportunities for 'those in manual and low-paid work'. Finally, the author revives the argument for paid educational leave (PEL).

Academic
Canada and USA
Chapter

Kennedy H (1995). *Return to Learn: UNISON's fresh start to trade union education*. UNISON.

Report of the external evaluation of Return to Learn, a trade union learning scheme which has now operated for some 10 years. This is an innovatory course which effectively recruits workers in less skilled jobs, often with few, if any, educational qualifications. Students progress to a wide variety of other courses, but also to new roles within the workplace and union. Students' comments about the courses demonstrate increased personal confidence, evidence of successful learning and skills for further learning. The scheme is particularly good for women, because it recognises the material constraints they have in attending conventional courses. Return to Learn combines face-to-face and home study.

Educational; industrial
UK
Report

Munro A, Rainbird H and Holly L (1997). *Partners in workplace learning: a report on the UNISON/employer learning and development programme*. UNISON.

Extends Kennedy's (1995) evaluation (see previous entry) by looking at the development of partnerships between UNISON and four large public sector employers: a university, two contrasting National Health Service Trusts, and the catering services of a county council. They define benefits for students going on courses, and also benefits of the partnership approach for both management and the trade union – UNISON. They also consider the role of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) as provider, and look at some of the advantages and problems of partnership working.

Academic; industrial
UK
Report

Stubbs A and Struk J (2000). *Better basic skills: learning with the unions*. Trades Union Congress.

Contains seven case studies – personal stories set within the context of particular trade union projects, covering a range of private and public sector jobs. In the foreword, John Monks, General Secretary of the TUC, writes: 'Unions have a unique role. We can persuade employers to work in partnership for common benefit and encourage members and others at work to take advantage of the opportunities offered'.

Industrial
UK
Booklet

TUC/BSA (2000). *Basic skills are union business*. Trades Union Congress/Basic Skills Agency.

There are a number of publications under this heading: a report; a summary document; a video; eight sectoral studies for: hotel and catering; construction; engineering; food industry; manufacturing; public sector; retail, distribution and home shopping; transport. There is also a handbook for providers, separately referenced in this report as Gathercole and Kelly (2000) (see **section B2.10**). Basic skills are seen in terms of the BSA standard definition, but also as a building block for key skills. The 'unique union role' is seen in terms of 'trust' between the union and its members, and the position of trade union learning representatives to 'gain vital support from employers for workplace learning programmes'. In practical terms, the trade union role encompasses the learning representatives, the work of the Trade Union Learning Fund projects (which include basic skills), the setting up of partnerships between employers, unions and providers, and ensuring the readability of workplace texts.

Government agency; industrial
UK
Booklets and video

B2.9 Outcomes and effectiveness of workplace basic skills programmes

ALBSU (1995). *Basic skills training at work. A study of effectiveness.* Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit.

'Examines the contribution that workplace training can make to improving basic skills of individuals and how this impacts on their work. Also considers indirect benefits of training programmes eg in self-esteem. Uses 17 employer-based case studies from a range of industries. Notes the general high degree of effectiveness in virtually all case studies and looks at how some practical constraints might be alleviated. Stresses the importance of management awareness and perceptions, to programme success.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 73) The report draws on the evaluation of the government-funded Basic Skills at Work programme, 1991–95, and was prepared by WMEB Consultants and K Ross.

Government agency; industrial
UK
Report
Key text

ANTA (Australian National Training Authority) (1997). *Adult literacy national project 1996/97: language, literacy and workplace change.* Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Literacy needs are described as very obvious, especially in relation to recent immigrants ('new' Australians) for whom English is not the first language. But the needs are generally ignored by business, leading to intervention by government. The research was based in 20 workplaces in five states, half of which had basic skills training and half of which did not. 'Recent research into the evaluation of the impact of communication skills development programs in Australian workplaces identified, among other things, performance indicators related directly to workplace change and communication skills in such areas as worker participation in teams, flexibility in the workplace, and productivity.' Employers who invest in basic skills training tend to have a longer-term commitment to their workforce, while their workers appear to be more involved with training and to show an 'understanding and acceptance of workplace change'. The research is described as 'ground-breaking'.

Government agency
Australia
Report

Benseman J and Moore L (2000). *Voices from the workplace.* Workbase, the National Centre for Workplace Literacy and Language.

This publication surveys some of the background to the growing interest in workplace language and literacy in New Zealand. The bulk of the text is made up of the stories of adult learners who have participated in workplace basic skills courses. These stories were recorded in conversation with John Benseman, whose comments frame the stories. The final section of the report considers the impact of these programmes on the learners and the range of benefits for workers that come from participation.

Government agency
New Zealand
Report

Bloom M, Burrows M, Lafleur B and Squires R (1997). *The economic benefits of improving literacy skills in the workplace*. Conference Board of Canada. ERIC ED412340

'A Canadian study explored the economic benefits of improving literacy skills in the workplace from the perspective of both employers and employees. The Conference Board identified and measured these benefits by conducting a survey of 40 employers, as well as by analysing data gathered in the International Adult Literacy Survey. The study found that enhancing literacy skills in the workplace enables employers to improve the performance of their businesses in a wide variety of ways that strengthen the bottom line. Literacy skills enhancement also enables employees to attain greater success in the workplace. Emphasis has recently shifted from increasing productivity by investing in machines and equipment to investing in employee training, since investments in equipment have not resulted in as much productivity growth as [is] needed to keep Canadians working and prospering. More highly skilled, literate people are the key to increasing productivity. At the same time, employees need to continuously acquire new skills to succeed in the modern workplace. Workers who acquire more skills have higher incomes, lower unemployment, more full-time work, and [a] higher probability of receiving training.' (source: ERIC abstract)

Government agency
Canada
Report

Bynner J and Parsons S (1998). *Use it or lose it? The impact of time out of work on literacy and numeracy skills*. Basic Skills Agency.

'The study examines whether people's literacy and numeracy skills get worse if they are out of paid employment. It is based on a sample of adults aged 37, who are part of the major cohort study, the National Child Development Study.' (source: summary version) It concludes that those who had reached a skills threshold were less likely to lose their skills; that training in work appeared to protect against skills loss; and that there should be opportunities for unemployed people to improve their basic skills. The study suggests that workplace training helps to maintain skills.

Government agency; educational; industrial
UK
Report

Clasby M (1997). *The voices of learners at work*. Final evaluation report. Partnership for Workplace Education. ERIC ED426220

Evaluation report of a federally funded workplace literacy programme which provided basic skills education at 7 sites in the area of Portland, Maine. More than 2000 workers took part between 1993 and 1996. The project emphasised partnership between employers and adult educators and a student-centred approach to learning. The evaluation report emphasises the positive contribution of the programme to business

operations at the sites, and its contribution to system changes. The project created a momentum for continuing learning activities in these firms.

Educational; industrial
USA
Report

de Wolff A (1999). *Workplace literacy pilot projects*. National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). ERIC ED431096

Review of 40 workplace literacy projects across Canada, funded by NLS, to determine their effectiveness in increasing the number and quality of Canadian workplace literacy programmes. Information obtained by review of relevant NLS material, interviews with practitioners and interviews with four of the 12 organisations conducting the pilot projects. Generally speaking, the projects were in three fields: learning activities; short-term organisational change strategies; long-term workplace structural change. 'The pilots have introduced literacy into a range of new industries and workplaces; however, only a small number of workplaces have created foundations for ongoing programs. Recommendations emerging from the review include calls for the NLS to fund more innovative workplace learning strategies and extend the time and financial resources for pilots to support more effective organizational change activities.' (source: ERIC abstract) Includes a methodological appendix.

Government agency
Canada
Report

Gowen S (1992). *The politics of workplace literacy: a case-study*. Teachers College Press.

'Sheryl Gowen's ethnographic study of a literacy programme for hospital workers is carried out over six months. She is an interviewer and observer during the designing phase of the programme, and a participant observer during implementation. Through these interviews and observations she describes in detail the political forces which influence programme management, design, worker attendance and success, and which determine how much workers can improve their prospects after attending literacy classes. Shows also how the varied communication and organisational skills of workers are respected in their communities and disregarded in their workplace. Concludes by calling for a more participatory model of workplace education, with all stakeholders, including the workers, posing problems and finding solutions.' (source: *Literacy and the new work order*, entry 23) Emphasises that 'Most employees come ... to class for their own reasons. They resist the program's narrow categories and attempt to learn what they believe they need to reach their own personal goals.'

Academic; educational
USA
Book
Key text

Hunter J (1999). In-Sites: studies in workforce literacy. *NALD Networks*, 4(4), 1–2.

An introductory note about a major ethnographic survey of literacy and literacy learning at work. The title of the project (In-Sites) suggests both a study that seeks to illuminate, and also its workplace focus. Literacy is seen as a social practice and part of a workplace culture. Based on five varied work sites. It will be disseminated to practitioners through workshops and professional development activities. See also Hunter J and Folinsbee S (2001). In-Sites: a study in workforce literacy: some preliminary findings. *Literacy Across the Curriculumedia Focus*, 15(1), 9–11. Centre for Literacy, Montreal. Also at http://www.nald.ca/litcent.htm.

Academic; educational; industrial
Canada
Article

James S and Priest S (1999). Skills for life. *Literacy Today*, December 1999, 6.

Reports on innovative basic skills in the workplace activities at a multinational company in the Forest of Dean area of England. The courses are marketed through emphasis on IT, but workers also receive literacy and numeracy assessment. Courses at the firm's learning centre are also open to retired staff and families, and fit around complex shift patterns. They have dispensed with 'misunderstood educational jargon', responding instead to individual needs and encouraging those who have no previous experience of training to take up the offer of vocational qualifications. The 245 people who attended the centre in 1998/9 – 33 family members, 14 retired staff and 198 workers – worked for nationally recognised qualifications including RSA CLAIT, City and Guilds Wordpower and Numberpower, and Open College Network (OCN) certificates.

Educational; industrial
UK
Article

Jurmo P (1996). *State-level policy for workplace basic education. What advocates are saying*. National Institute for Literacy. ERIC ED402444

The author collected information from 41 adult educators, policy developers, union representatives and employers across 26 states. Jurmo found that basic education was given a low priority at state level. Elements of good policy were identified as: based on careful, comprehensive assessment; linking workplace basic skills activities to other workforce development; ensuring the readiness of workplace education providers, employers and unions; facilitating investment by employers, unions and workers; requiring accountability; and promoting collaboration at state and local levels.

Academic; educational; industrial
USA
Report

Machin S, McIntosh S, Vignoles A and Viitanen T (2001). *Basic skills, soft skills and labour market outcomes: secondary analysis of the National Child Development Study*. Research report RR250. Department for Education and Employment.

Research carried out by the Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics for the UK government. 'The research shows that literacy and numeracy skills display a larger, more robust connection with individuals' labour market and other outcomes than their motivation or 'soft skills' such as sociability, achievement orientation, caring skills, and attitudes to life in general. Literacy and numeracy have an independent effect on life chances, even after controlling for these attitudinal variables.' Concludes that '...for adults with very low basic skills, improving their numeracy to at least Level 1 will have a greater effect on earnings than improving their literacy, but ... adults already with a good grounding in basic skills will see the greatest wage gains from further increasing their literacy rather than numeracy skills.' (source: research brief)

Academic; government agency
UK
Report

McHugh G (2001). *Essential skills for work: building the capacity to deliver and learn. An evaluation of the DfES's Building Basic Skills in the Workplace initiative.* Summary interim report. Centre for the Study of Education and Training, University of Lancaster.

This is the first outcome of the evaluation of the UK government's Building Basic Skills in the Workplace initiative, which consisted of 32 projects, most of which were due to end in 2001. These projects involved firms in the private sector, together with public sector and non-profit employers. Projects were of three kinds: developing new work; building upon existing workplace schemes; regional networking for marketing, professional development and provision. The report concludes that, in general, these projects have offered good value for money, increased networking and increased numbers of providers. They are increasing the amount of professional development work, providing development time for the design of company schemes, and enabling providers to target particular groups of firms. Two issues which the author highlighted for immediate attention were the lack of trained staff in this area of work, and the need for longer-term funding to secure the viability of development work.

Academic; educational; industrial; government agency
UK
Report

Merrifield J, Bingham M, Hemphill D and Bennet de Marais K (1998). *Literacy, language and technology in everyday life.* Teachers College Press.

'One of the few reports of adult learners' perspectives on their literacy experiences, this book documents the life stories of 12 adults living in two parts of the USA who have been part of adult basic education programmes. This book gives their perspectives on literacy and work, education and experiences of changing technologies.' (source: review in *RaPAL Bulletin,* 38, 39)

Academic; educational
USA
Book

Mikulechy L, Albers P and Peers M (1994). *Literacy transfer: a review of the literature.* Technical report TR94-05. National Centre on Adult Literacy (NCAL), Indiana University.

Raises important issues about literacy transfer: what it is; the extent to which it happens; how it can be facilitated. 'Investigations of this issue seek to discover the degree to which practices of literacy learned on training programmes transfer to new situations on the job. Such training programmes may be attended both at school and at the workplace. The authors state that there seems to exist "only a limited relationship between general literacy ability and the ability to use literacy on the job"'. (source: Andrade de Souza Descardeci 1997)

Academic
USA
Report

Moore M, Myers D, Silva T, Alamprese J (1998). *Addressing literacy needs at work: implementation and impact of workplace literacy programs*. Final report. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service. ERIC ED426285

The US National Workplace Literacy Program started in 1988. This study focuses on five partnerships funded in 1994. It aims to describe the implementation and institutionalisation of workplace literacy programmes and to assess the impact on participating workers. Major conclusions were that: programme effectiveness is related to instructional time; implementation is aided by experience and local state infrastructure; institutionalisation is associated with incentives for workers. Contains useful methodological appendices.

Academic; government agency
USA
Report

Noel A (1998a). *The impact of Oxfordshire County Council Basic Skills at Work programme on the company learning culture*. Oxfordshire County Council.

Numbers of semi-skilled employees take up opportunities in Oxfordshire to improve their basic skills when classes are available at work and in work time. There are many reasons why organisations may be reluctant to provide a workplace basic skills programme, for example, limited funds even for vocational training. However, one of the most important factors influencing this decision seems to be whether or not the organisation believes that their business objectives can be achieved through workforce development activities. ... The research findings suggest that these senior managers are more impressed at the development outcomes of the programme (eg interest in learning and confidence) and impact on staff retention rather than associated improvements in job skills. The findings also suggest that these person-centred training programmes have been the driving-force for new or strengthened commitment within the organisation to a broad notion of employee development.' (source: Noel's summary)

Educational; industrial
UK
Report

Parry J (1998). Cadbury: an employer partnership. In *Basic skills and further education: communities confront linguistic elitism and social exclusion*, (eds) A Frankel *et al.*, 214–217. Bilston College Publications/Education Now.

This reports on a major college–employer partnership, based at the company's learning centre. The learning is free, but students studied in their own time. The Cadbury's scheme is a large one and reached 400 workers (10% of the staff) in its first year. The curriculum is English, mathematics and IT, with courses appropriate to individuals' levels. The aim is to break down the divide between vocational and non-vocational education by providing courses which offer both personal development and work-related skills. The firm hopes to use the success of the scheme as a springboard to introduce NVQs for shop-floor staff. The scheme also provides opportunities for progression: in 1996, 20 students took GCSE English, with a 100% pass rate.

Educational
UK
Chapter

Payne J (2000a). *The Dorset Upskill at Work project January 1999–June 2000: an evaluation report*. Dorset Training and Enterprise Council.

Reports on an 18-month period within the ongoing life of a successful local basic skills in the workplace scheme. This began life as an FEFC-funded project, but during the reporting period was mainly funded by the European Commission (European Social Fund). During the reporting period, over 500 workers had taken part in training courses, ranging across 34 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Basic IT courses were the largest category, followed by communications. The author concluded that such projects should emphasise specific basic skills needs (including IT) within the workplace, and be complemented by equally well-resourced community-based projects.

Educational; industrial
UK
Report

Pearson G (1996). *More than money can say: the impact of ESL and literacy training in the Australian workplace*. Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

A report which involved interviews with 500 respondents in 30 workplaces, representing 13 industries and five states. There is a second volume containing statistical evidence. The analysis is based on the concept of 'stakeholders' – workers, unions, supervisors, managers. The author attempts to provide quantitative evidence on five issues: direct cost savings; access to further training; participation in meetings and teams; promotion and job flexibility; value of training. Savings were identified in 72% of workplaces, while 72% of managers and 63% of participants thought attitudes to training had improved. Generally concludes that 'The vast majority of managers, training participants, supervisors and union representatives considered that the whole range of workplace and workforce issues surveyed had improved as a result of language and literacy training in their workplace.' Literacy programmes were particularly effective when integrated with specific issues in specific workplaces.

Government agency
Australia
Report

Sabatini J (1997). A case study perspective on policy and practice in adult learning. *NCAL Connections*, Fall 1997,1–4. ERIC ED417301

A case study of the progress over a three-year period of participation in adult basic education by an African American woman in her mid-40s. She did not make enough progress to move to a high-school equivalency programme or to incorporate her new skills in her daily life. 'It was thought that she might have been helped more by a more contextual and less skill-based curriculum, if such a programme had been available. Case-studies such as this can be used to evaluate literacy education efforts and make appropriate policy reforms.' (source: ERIC abstract)

Academic
USA
Article

Sticht T and Armstrong W (1994). *Adult literacy in the United States: a compendium of quantitative data and interpretative comments*. National Institute for Literacy. Also at www.nald.ca/fulltext/work-a-l.htm

Contains useful background information on adult literacy in the USA. Section 23 relates to 'Literacy, occupational status and job performance'. The NALD database also has full-text copies of other works by Tom Sticht and associates, particularly his work on 'functional context education' and for the Secretary's Commission on the Achievement of Necessary Skills (SCANS).

Academic
USA
Report

B2.10 Professional development

Frank F and Holland C (eds) (1998). *Breaking down barriers: certificate in workplace basic skills training for adult basic education tutors and co-ordinators*. National Institute for Adult Continuing Education.

'A pack of photo-copiable training materials for experienced basic skills tutors considering moving into workplace basic skills delivery. Also useful to tutors delivering other subjects at workplaces, as part of an employee development scheme. A section on company culture will interest tutors delivering courses for employees on day release.' (source: NIACE catalogue) A revised edition is in preparation.

Educational
UK
Training materials

Gathercole J and Kelly C (2000). *Working with unions: handbook for basic skills providers*. Trades Union Congress/Basic Skills Agency.

Contains a foreword by Liz Smith (National Officer, Learning Services, TUC), which makes a strong case for college/union links: 'Some providers may be unused to outreach work whether in the workplace or the community. They may be used to working with employers, but have very little experience of working with unions or union/employer partnerships.' The main text covers the potential of trade union learning representatives and the government's desire to respond to the problem of low skill levels. There is also material on assessment, curriculum and delivery, learning materials, quality, sustainability and expectations.

Educational; government agency; industrial
UK
Training materials

Howard L and Taw R (2001). *Key skills analysis*. Gower.

'A manual to help enterprises identify key skills gaps at all levels of their organisations, including individual employees and teams. Will enable HR managers and supervisors to carry out skills analyses. Provides detailed suggestions on how to set up specific staff development programmes to deal with skills gaps.' (source: publisher's promotional material)

Educational; industrial
UK
Training materials

National Staff Development Committee for Vocational Education and Training (1995). *Research report on professional development needs in vocational education and training in relation to developing language, literacy and numeracy competence*. National Staff Development Committee for Vocational Education and Training.

Reports on an investigation which involved a literature review, collection of training packages, and 135 interviews with writers, trainers, TAFE staff, and focus groups with trainers and writers. They found that there is a paucity of published professional development programmes and a low awareness of what is available. They identified development needs in relation to numeracy, Level 1 trainers, and the needs of the majority of writers and vocational teachers.

Government agency
Australia
Report

Sanguinetti J (2000). An adventure in 'postmodern' action research: performativity, professionalism and power. In *Research and knowledge at work: perspectives, case-studies and innovative strategies*, (eds) J Garrick and C Rhodes, 232–249. Routledge.

The author gives an account of action research with adult literacy teachers in the Australian state of Victoria's TAFE system, grappling with the limitations of competence-based assessment. The aim was to persuade them to be more reflective in their work. 'Performativity' (defined here as the best possible input/output equation) is seen as the desired outcome of their work, reducing public expenditure and streamlining the private

sector. She admits that most of the time in meetings with the teachers was taken up by stress and crisis: 'Despite my best facilitatory efforts, the impact of their immediate problems meant that they had little space to take up my invitation to use the analysis as basis for reflection about their own discursive positioning and practice'.

Academic; educational
Australia
Chapter

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B3 Contacts and websites

UK

Adults Learning Mathematics – A research forum (ALM)
www.alm-online.org

Avanti Books
8 Parsons Green
Boulton Road
Stevenage
Herts SG1 4QG
Tel 01438 350155

Basic Skills Agency (BSA)
Commonwealth House
1–19 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1NU
Tel 020 7405 4017
www.basic-skills.co.uk/

Basic Skills Agency Resource Centre
Institute of Education, University of London
20 Bedford Way
London WC1H 0AL
Link from Resources page on www.basic-skills.co.uk/

Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
Centre Point
New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1DU
Tel 020 7379 7400
www.cbi.org.uk/

Department of Education and Skills (DfES)
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT
Tel 020 7273 3000
www.dfes.gov.uk
www.lifelonglearning.co.uk (for all lifelong learning information)
DfES Basic Skills Strategy Unit
www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus (Skills for Life Strategy)

Lancaster Literacy Research Group
c/o Department of English and Modern Languages
University of Lancaster
Lancaster LA1 4YL
www.literacy.lancaster.ac.uk/

Learning and Skills Council
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Tel 0845 019 4170
www.lsc.gov.uk

Learning and Skills Development Agency
(services for Basic Skills and ESOL)
Regent Arcade House
19–25 Argyll Street
London W1F 7LS
Tel 020 7297 9000
Fax 020 7297 9001
www.LSDA.org.uk

The London Language and Literacy Unit
103 Borough Road
South Bank University
London SE1 0AA
Tel 020 7815 6290
Fax 020 7815 6296
www.sbu.ac.uk/LLLU/

National Association for Teaching English
and other Community Languages (NATECLA)
c/o South Birmingham College
520–524 Stratford Road
Birmingham B11 4AJ
Tel 0121 688 8121

National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)
21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE
Tel 0116 204 4200
www.niace.org.uk

National Literacy Trust
59 Buckingham Gate
London SW1E 6AJ
Tel 020 7828 2435
www.literacytrust.org.uk

National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE)
27 Britannia Street
London WC1X 9JP
Tel: 020 7837 3636
www.natfhe.org.uk

National Training Organisations National Council
10 Meadowcourt
Amos Road
Sheffield S9 1BX
Tel 0114 261 9926
www.nto-nc.org

Plain English Campaign
Tel 01663 744409
www.plainenglish.co.uk/

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) (membership)
Wendy Moss and Mary La Touche
c/o The City Literary Institute
Stukeley Street
London WC2B 5LJ.

Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) (general enquiries)
Gaye Houghton (Secretary)
124 Town Lane
Whittle Le Woods
Chorley PR6 8AG
www.literacy.lancaster.ac.uk/rapal/rapal.htm

TUC Learning Services
The Cotton Exchange
Suite 506–510
Old Hall Street
Liverpool L3 9UD
Tel 0151 236 7678
www.tuc.org.uk/

UNISON Education and Training Department
20 Grand Depot Road
London SE18 6SF
Tel 020 8854 2244
www.unison.org.uk/

Workbase Training
Finchley House Business Centre
707 High Road
London N12 0BT
Tel 020 8492 0330
www.caritasdata.co.uk/charity3/ch008543.htm

Workplace Basic Skills Network
c/o Centre for the Study of Education and Training (CSET)
University of Lancaster
Lancaster LA1 4YL
Tel 01524 593405
www.lancs.ac.uk/wbsnet

Australia

Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC)
www.staff.vu.edu.au/alnarc/

Adult Numeracy in Australia
www.aris.com.au/numeracy

Australian Adult Education Resource and Information Service
http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/language-australia

Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL)
www.acal.edu.au

Language Australia (formerly National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia)
www.languageaustralia.com.au/

Canada

ABC Canada Literacy Foundation
www.abc-canada.org/

AlphaPlus Index to Web Resources
(over 680 websites which contain resources of interest to literacy and ESOL practitioners and learners)
http://alphaplus.ca

Centre for Literacy in Quebec
www.nald.ca/litcent.htm

National Adult Literacy Database
(hosts websites of numerous Canadian literacy organisations)
www.nald.ca

New Approaches to Lifelong Learning Network
www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/res/index.htm

Workplace Basic Skills
(website aimed at employers, but has useful links to resources and research findings)
www.workplacebasicskills.com

Ireland

National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
76 Lower Gardiner Street
Dublin 1
Tel (01) 8554332
www.iol.ie/~nala

Europe (and beyond)

Eurobasic Skills
www.eurobasicskills.org/

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
Website includes the final report of the IALS

www.oecd.org/els/education/literacy/

New Zealand

The National Centre for Workplace Literacy and Language
326 New North Road
Kingsland
Box 56571
Dominion Road
Auckland
www.workbase.org.nz

USA

ERIC (clearing house on adult, career and vocational education)
www.ed.gov/EdRes/EdFed/ERIC.html

LINCS (literacy resources)
http://novel.nifl.gov

National Centre for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)
http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/index.html

National Institute for Literacy
(website includes full details of *Equipped for the future* (Stein 2000 in **section B2.1**)
www.nifl.gov/

University of Pennsylvania
(resources for adult literacy)
http://litserver.literacy.upenn.edu

Appendix 1

List of those attending the LSDA expert seminar on 21 May 2001

Marge Bentovin, Basic Skills Agency

Fiona Frank, Workplace Basic Skills Network

Sue Grief, Learning and Skills Development Agency

Professor Mary Hamilton, University of Lancaster

Chris Holland, Workplace Basic Skills Network

Ursula Howard, Learning and Skills Development Agency

Maria Hughes, Learning and Skills Development Agency

Lynn Mulford, Training Matters

John Payne, Author

Judith Swift, Trade Union Learning Fund

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